THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

argosy

MARCH

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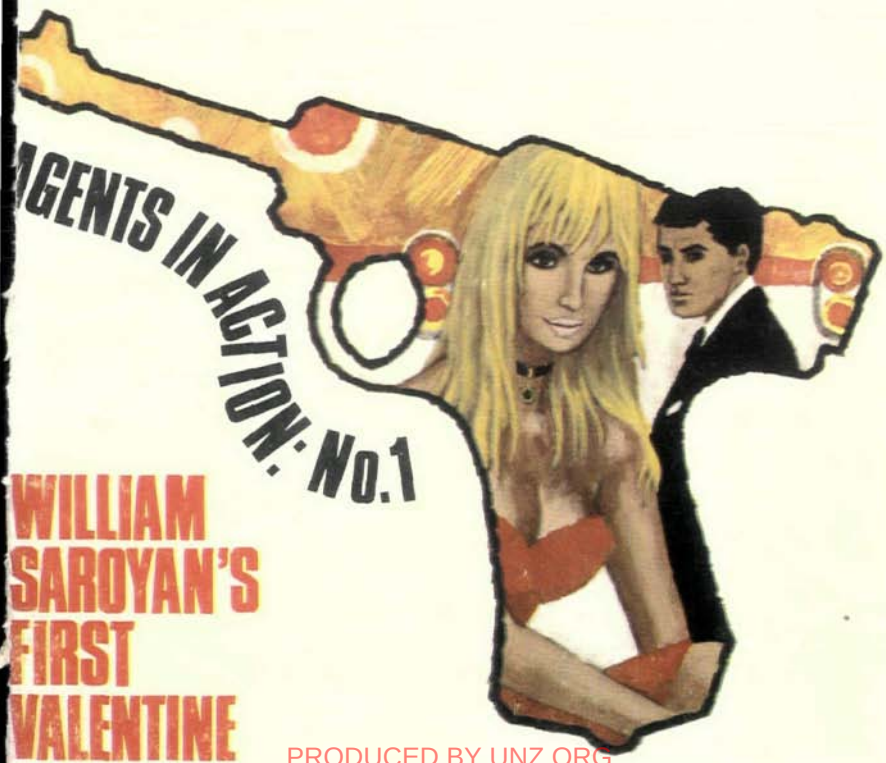

WILLIAM SAROYAN'S FIRST VALENTINE

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Argosy constantly seeks out stories of exceptional force and originality. Half a Million Lire is such a one, a tragic tale set in southern Italy, where life's choices are few, and often cruel . . . and startling

HALF A MILLION LIRE

BY LOUIS BATTYE

THE Manager of the Società d'Assicurazione Siciliana tapped his ball-point pen on the desk, trying to hide his astonishment. "But you'll agree, Signor Zucci, that this is a most unusual —ah—proposition?"

Carlo's black eyes met his stonily, then he gave a brief nod. "You say you insure anything."

"We do—well, against any ordinary risk: fire, storm, theft . . . But your daughter's—ah—honour . . . I can't recall any similar policy in all my experience!"

"It is very simple," Carlo said, his voice level, almost cold. "Margherita is seventeen and beautiful. Next week she leaves home and goes to the North to work in a hotel with her aunt who has found her the job. Her mother and I don't want her to go, but we are poor people and there are a dozen mouths to feed. Our soil is not good. It is better for her to go. But in the North they're not as moral as we are and, although she is a good girl and has been properly brought up and although her aunt will watch over her, there is a risk. For if she returns without her virginity, no man in Sicily will marry her. So I want to insure against it. That is all."

"I see," the Manager said, beginning to get over his astonishment. These peasants! he thought. And in this day and age! "How long will your daughter be in the North?"

"Four months. Until the end of the tourist season."

"Mmm." The Manager was now finding it difficult to keep his

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face straight. "And what part of the North is she going to be working in?"

"Portovecchio, near Vallezia," Carlo said with distaste. "The Hotel Liguria."

"Portovecchio—yes. And—ah—what kind of a sum have you in mind, Signor Zucci?"

Carlo looked down at the desk and thrust out his lower lip. Then that steady black stare was again trained on the Manager. "Half a million lire."

The other tapped his pen. That'll be a fortune to him, he thought wryly. Well, if the man was serious—and it looked like it—this should be treated simply as a business deal. After all, odder things had been insured, if only in America. "Well, Signor Zucci, I think my firm might be prepared to accept this policy—subject, of course, to certain conditions. For instance, we wouldn't accept any liability in the event of rape."

Carlo flushed. "No," he whispered.

"And we must see the girl, to form an estimate of the—ah—risk."

"I have brought her. She's waiting outside."

"Good! Good! Also she will have to be medically examined first."

"What!"

"By a woman doctor, of course," the Manager said hastily. "Clearly we can't offer any cover until we're satisfied she—"

"My daughter is as pure as the snow!"

"Yes, I'm sure she is, Signor Zucci. But these formalities must be observed."

Carlo rose abruptly. "I'll bring her in."

Margherita was indeed beautiful. The Manager's eyebrows rose appreciatively as he noted the smooth olive complexion, the regular features, the lustrous dark eyes, the blue-black hair, the luscious figure. There was certainly going to be a risk. "Now, signorina," he said, smiling, "you approve of your father's—ah—proposition?"

"Yes."

"Of course she does!" Carlo snapped.

"Good! And the conditions we shall have to impose?"

The gorgeous gaze turned uncertainly to the Manager, then to Carlo.

"There are—formalities, *cara mia*."

"Oh. Then yes . . ."

"Excellent! Well, signor, the deal will have to be approved by the Board of Directors, acting on the advice of our actuaries

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who will work out the premium. We should be able to give you a definite answer in about a week."

Though he wasn't sure what an actuary was, Carlo nodded. Five minutes later father and daughter were out in the rackety, sun-beaten Palermo street on their way home.

And so the Società d'Assicurazione Siciliana accepted its strangest insurance risk. Ten days later Carlo and Margherita were back in Palermo, where Margherita demurely submitted to the "formalities" and Carlo reluctantly signed the agreement (he hated putting his name to anything that looked so official) and paid the premium—even more reluctantly. The premium was larger than he had anticipated, but he left the Manager's office feeling that on the whole he'd struck a good bargain. His daughter's honour was a valuable property. And when three weeks later the ship carrying Margherita left Palermo for Naples the feeling strengthened, and he went home more content than he would otherwise have done.

The weeks passed. Margherita wrote home regularly and her letters were read and re-read by every literate member of the family. Portovecchio was strange and she was very homesick at first, but now she was getting used to it. The work at the hotel wasn't too hard, though the hours were long, and when she was off-duty Aunt Serafina sometimes took her to Vallezia to see the shops, which were full of marvellous things but terribly expensive, and sometimes to see a film. She went to Mass every Sunday. But she missed them all very much and was just waiting for the time when she would be home again . . . Carlo pored over the large innocent scrawl and nodded with satisfaction. Yes, she was a good, sensible girl.

The summer wore on, the sun crashing down day after day, baking, parching, shrivelling. But the wheat and vines and olives ripened, and in less than two months Margherita would be back home. Sitting in the *tavèrna* drinking the rough local red wine, Carlo thought that life could be much worse.

He wasn't to think this for long.

One evening towards the end of August two strangers arrived at the Zuccis' home. One was youngish and pale with a concave scar on the left side of his forehead; the other, middle-aged with a dark, brutal face. Carlo didn't like the look of them at all, but he received them courteously. His wife having removed herself and the younger members of their brood to allow the men to talk undisturbed, he asked them to what he owed this honour.

The younger visitor's smile was almost pleasant. They were

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here, he said, on behalf of a great charitable organisation which did work of enormous value among widows, orphans and the blind. And as Signor Zucci's magnificent generosity was famous for miles around they had taken the liberty of calling to see whether he would be interested in making a donation to such a worthy cause. They were sure he would. The dark-faced man nodded agreement.

There was a short pause. What was this? Charity was for priests and other *religiosi*, not men who looked like ...

"I am a poor man, gentlemen," Carlo said.

The younger man smiled again. "Signor Zucci, you're too modest. Everyone knows yours is the most prosperous farm in the district. Your vines go to make the finest Marsala in Sicily; your olives burst with oil; your wheat always fetches good prices. I congratulate you, indeed I do, on your well-merited success."

"You're mistaken, signor. My soil is barren. My sons and I slave like bullocks to scratch a poor living. Life is hard, signor."

"But not as hard as it is for the poor widows and orphans whom we help. *They* would say you live in luxury. It is for their sakes that I appeal to your generosity."

Carlo spread out his hands. He was beginning to feel afraid, for he had a good idea of the nature of the "charity" his visitors represented. The *banditti* deserved to be chased out of the house with a knife, but although Carlo was no coward he dare not do it.

"Your name, Signor Zucci, has been given to us by certain business interests closely connected with our work, business interests to whose great generosity we owe so much."

Carlo felt his face go paler than his visitor's; his hands began to tremble. Oh, God in heaven, not *them*! True, it wasn't now quite like the old days, but even today ... "And—er—how much might be expected from me, signor?"

"We thought perhaps a sum in the region of half a million lire wouldn't be too much from a man in your position, Signor Zucci," the pale man smiled, and now his smile wasn't pleasant at all.

Carlo thought he was going to faint. It was fantastic! Even *they* must know that such a sum was out of the question. And precisely the amount for which he'd insured Margherita's honour! Surely they didn't know about that? Unless the Manager in Palermo or some other official was one of them. But no, it *must* be a coincidence. "You're joking, signor!"

"Joking? Why should we joke? I might add that the business

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interests I mentioned would be most disappointed if, having given your name in all good faith, nothing came of it. However, that's entirely up to you."

Carlo shivered. The threat was unmistakable. "But still—why me? Why not the others?"

The older man spoke, his voice as harsh as the other's was smooth. "We knew your brother Giuseppe, the one who went to work at the oil refinery at Siracusa."

"Yes," the younger said. "An excellent man in many respects, though there were a few strange stories concerning him."

"Strange stories?"

"Yes. There was one about some false information being given to the police, resulting in an unjust prison sentence. There were others, too. But of course he is now in America." And the younger man smiled at Carlo.

So that was it. The fool! Carlo thought bitterly. The stupid interfering fool! With his political pamphlets and crazy talk about social justice. Lucky for him he went to America! He should be safe in Seattle. Refusing to believe that *omertà* still meant something! And now *I* must suffer for it. He looked from the pale face to the dark one and saw no sympathy. He said, "I must think it over."

"Of course, Signor Zucci! Though I've no doubt that when you have you'll certainly give us a donation." The younger man rose. "Thank you for listening to us so kindly. With your permission we will call again. Meanwhile we sincerely hope that all goes well for you and that you have a good harvest. For so many unfortunate things can happen, can't they?"

Carlo forced himself to touch the pale man's proffered hand; the dark man didn't move his. The visitors left and Carlo collapsed on to a chair, clutching his head in both hands. When his wife returned and asked questions about his visitors he silenced her abruptly and stamped out of the house.

Two nights later a barn mysteriously caught fire. Carlo wasn't really surprised. Then a spring became poisoned.

He was in despair. To go to the police was unthinkable: it was through Giuseppe's foolish defiance of *omertà* that this frightful thing had happened. It was purely between himself and *them*—and in his heart he knew he'd no chance. He lay awake at night; during the day he was haggard and morose. Occasionally he flew into terrible rages.

A donkey was found dead.

Carlo took a piece of paper and a pencil and laboriously

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calculated that the very most he could give to the "charity" was a hundred thousand lire. It wouldn't satisfy them but he would have to offer it.

The visitors came again, the pale one still dangerously polite, the other silent and menacing. Had Signor Zucci decided to make his generous donation?

"I can give you a hundred thousand lire only. More than that is impossible."

"We appreciate the kindness of the gesture, of course, but frankly we expected a larger sum. Our business connections will be hurt that you have offered less than they suggested."

"It is impossible! A hundred thousand will practically ruin me as it is."

"I don't think so, Signor Zucci. I don't think so."

They took the hundred thousand lire and said they would come again. That night there was a second fire. The harvest didn't promise to be a good one—and what there was they could destroy. Carlo wept. Better, he thought, to kill them both, even though he would then certainly die himself within twenty-four hours. But there was his wife and family, and who knew where their sufferings would end if his sons carried on a vendetta! He wept again.

Now his face only came to life when he read Margherita's letters. She was still well, still going to Mass every Sunday and out with Aunt Serafina, still waiting for the day (only a month!) when she would be home . . . Ah, the dear innocent child! Little did she know what she would come home to.

But one day as he carefully put one of her letters back in the envelope a thought so monstrous entered his mind that he paled. The insurance. If he were to draw it— But no, he deserved to die for such a thought! Nevertheless he began to study Margherita's letters with even more care than usual, as if trying to discover behind the naive roundly-scrawled phrases some subtle change of mood, some barely detectable suggestion, revealed perhaps in a trivial alteration or a slip of the pen, that a more intimate influence than Mass and Aunt Serafina had entered her life.

"Yesterday was my day off and I went on a coach trip up into the mountains—" "I"? Not *"we"? "I enjoyed it very much but Aunt Serafina was frightened by the narrow road—"* Had she added that bit about Aunt Serafina in order to disarm suspicion, having really been up into the mountains with some man? Carlo was forced to admit that there wasn't a shred of evidence for thinking any such thing. I'm going crazy, he thought.

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When one morning he found that during the night a heavy-tracked vehicle had been driven right through his choicest vines he knew that only the insurance money could save him. But in less than three weeks Margherita would be home, and the chances now of drawing a lira were slim indeed. Unless—

The men from the "charity" came a third time and now the pale man's mask of politeness was very thin. "Are you going to make the rest of your donation, Signor Zucci?"

"I can pay no more."

"I'm afraid you must, Signor Zucci."

For a second Carlo was tempted to draw his knife. But the dark man would have a gun. "I'll pay," he whispered. "Give me time—a month only."

God forgive me, he thought. She can always become a nun.

The Hotel Liguria was medium-sized and fairly new, with the frivolous wedding-cake architecture of the Riviera. To the left, at the end of the street, lights blazed from the sea-front; by comparison the street itself was almost dim. It was five minutes to ten.

Carlo passed the hotel for the fourth time. He walked slowly with his head bent, the brim of his broad black hat pulled down over his forehead, the strain of his thoughts and the long weary journey showing on his face. Margherita had said she came off duty at ten; almost certainly she would then take a short walk before going to bed. Running along the side of the hotel was a narrow open passage: somewhere up there or perhaps round the back would be the staff entrance. He paused to peer into the dimness, then walked on. He had only the vaguest idea what he was going to do: it was something he hadn't cared to think about in detail.

Ten o'clock. He crossed the road. Here there was a garage, now closed. If he stood behind a petrol pump he could watch the passage next to the hotel without being noticed.

After a while a young man emerged from the passage and turned towards the sea-front. Then came a small group of men and women who stood talking and laughing for a minute before breaking up into ones and twos. Carlo stared across eagerly, but Margherita wasn't among them. When they had gone the passage was quiet for a time, and he began to wonder whether she was going to appear. Suddenly a girl emerged and stood on the pavement as if waiting for someone. As soon as he saw her he knew it was Margherita. His heart jumped and he had to restrain himself from running across to her. That would be madness; she

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must on no account know he was here. Why was she waiting? For a man?

Then another figure appeared, a dumpy middle-aged woman. Aunt Serafina. Margherita and she set off up the street, away from the sea-front, and Carlo relaxed, relief and disappointment warring in his mind.

He slipped from behind the pump and made for the blaze of lights.

It was a delectable evening, the air caressingly soft. Carlo walked slowly along the promenade. His feet ached and he felt utterly weary. He must sit down. Palm trees grew at regular intervals, each with a seat under it, but all the seats appeared to be occupied, mostly by young couples. On one a boy and girl kissed openly. Shocked, Carlo walked on, thinking that they wouldn't do that in Sicily.

At last he came to a seat occupied only by a young man sitting at one end, and Carlo thankfully sat down at the other. After a moment he glanced at his companion. The young man was lounging with his legs crossed, looking bored, and Carlo saw that he was about twenty-two, tall and extraordinarily handsome with crisply-curling brown hair and features at once dreamy and sensual. A northerner evidently, and Carlo eyed with curiosity this representative of a strange immoral species.

The young man turned his head and for a second his brown eyes met Carlo's black ones. Carlo smiled awkwardly and said, *"Buòna sera."*

The young man smiled back and nodded. *"Buòna sera."*

Carlo turned away and fumbled for his cigarettes. He is beautiful, he thought. He pulled out a packet of cigarettes and on an impulse offered one to the young man.

"Oh, thanks."

Carlo produced matches, but the young man was first with a lighter. They smoked for a few moments, then Carlo turned to him again.

"It's a beautiful evening."

"Isn't it?" the young man said indifferently.

A couple passed, their arms tight around each other. Carlo watched them with disapproval, then told himself grimly that he couldn't afford to have such an attitude. "You're alone?" he forced himself to say. "No girl?"

The young man laughed wryly. "Would I be sitting here like this if I had? Ah, you can't get girls in this dump—not pretty ones. They all have men. I think I'll go over to Vallezia tomorrow—it's my day off. There are girls there. I'll get one. And then

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—ah-*ha!*" He smiled with keen anticipation and astonishing charm.

The wickedness! Carlo thought, marvelling. The fathers of these girls, had they no sense of honour? But the young man was still talking, and Carlo listened. He learned that the other's name was Vittorio and that he came from Milan and was a waiter at the Hotel Roma.

"And you like being a waiter?"

"It's not a bad job. The pay's fair, if you count tips. And one meets people, tourists—French, German, American, English. Including girls, of course. But it's not easy to get the girls; they usually have men with them, and they don't go for waiters much anyway. And if you take one to a room in the afternoon and you're caught—*phuit!*—it's the sack!" He smiled. "I've been sacked twice. But there's no-one worth risking the sack for in the Hotel Roma right now—except one, and her husband never lets her out of his sight. Ah well, I'll get one in Vallezia."

Communists! Carlo thought. He sat for a while in silence, his fists involuntarily clenched from the effort of will he was making. As casually as he could he said, "Have you seen that waitress at the Hotel Liguria?"

Vittorio looked interested.

"No. What's she like?"

"Beautiful. Glossy black hair—you know, the southern type."

"I like the southern type. They're passionate. How old?"

"Oh, seventeen—eighteen, I'd say."

"Mmm, *yes*! Her name?"

"I think she's called Margherita."

"Margherita," Vittorio murmured. "But of course she'll have a boy friend?"

"I don't think so. There's an old aunt or somebody working with her in the hotel. They go out together always. I know all this from a friend who worked for a time in the hotel. I myself saw her go out with the aunt not long ago. They were going in the other direction." Carlo's gaze swung abruptly away.

"Well, this sounds worth investigating," Vittorio grinned. "And if she's all you say she is—"

His fists clenching harder, Carlo fought down a brief blaze of fury.

"The old aunt, what about her?" he said harshly.

"Oh, don't worry about the old aunt! If necessary we'll soon get rid of her. Or rather Margherita will."

"Eh?"

"If you can persuade the girl in the first place, you can always

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safely leave it to her to escape from her mother or aunt or whoever's in the way. She'll always think of an excuse or a trick. Believe me—I *know*!" Vittorio laughed.

In spite of everything, Carlo felt a twinge of grudging admiration for this atrocious young goat. "Ah!" he said, trying to smile.

Vittorio glanced at his watch. "A quarter to eleven. Think I'll take a walk up towards the Hotel Liguria and see if I can see her as she comes back. I suppose she's living in?"

"Yes."

"Good!" Vittorio rose. "Well, thanks for the information: I'll see it's not wasted. I work quickly. *Ciao!*"

"Ciao."

When Vittorio had gone, Carlo took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He was trembling slightly. Five minutes later he too rose.

As soon as he reached the corner of the street Carlo saw Vittorio lounging outside the Hotel Liguria, apparently trying to read a newspaper by the light of a street-lamp. Carlo stole up the other side to the garage and again hid behind the pump. He hadn't been waiting long before Margherita and Aunt Serafina returned. Tensely Carlo watched. With an air of casual boredom Vittorio folded his paper and stuffed it into his pocket, then turned just as the two women approached. It was beautifully done. *"Buòna notte*, signora, signorina," Carlo heard him say. For a second Margherita's step slowed and she looked at Vittorio. Then *"Buòna notte"* came two voices, and Margherita followed her aunt up the passage beside the hotel. Vittorio watched them until they were out of sight before walking away. Carlo couldn't see the young man's expression, but there was no misunderstanding his jaunty swagger.

Three days later Carlo carefully followed Margherita and Vittorio along the Via Petrarca. It was mid-afternoon, very hot, and the narrow cobbled street was crowded with tourists, but somehow he managed to keep his quarry in view. The couple were holding hands.

They went into a small bar. Carlo daren't follow them in, but he stood for a moment near the door, looking into the shady interior. He saw them sit down, their hands immediately rejoining under the table, Vittorio's face ardently close to the girl's. Carlo left quickly, but he stationed himself where he could keep watch on the entrance.

After a while they came out, now walking intimately close,

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the young man's arm round Margherita's waist. Carlo flushed and ground his teeth, but he forced himself to follow them with even more caution. They returned to the newer part of the town, and Carlo realised they were making for the Hotel Roma. Taking cover in the stark shadow of a doorway, he watched Vittorio leave Margherita twenty yards from the hotel and disappear through the staff entrance. As she stood patiently on the pavement it was again all Carlo could do to prevent himself from rushing to her, but somehow he managed not to. Suddenly she turned, walked quickly to the hotel and followed Vittorio through the staff entrance.

For the next hour Carlo stood in a kind of trance, telling himself over and over that the "charity's" price would not alter. They wouldn't ask for more. They had honour of a kind.

When Margherita eventually reappeared alone she was holding her head low. Carlo groaned; he thought that even at that distance he could see that her face was pale. He came out quietly from the doorway and went to her.

She stopped, paralysed with shock, her face flushing, then going very pale. *"Papà mio!"*

"Where have you been, Margherita?"

"I—"

He thought she was going to burst into tears. Instead, after a brief quiver of her lips, the great dark eyes looked steadily into his; there was even a hint of defiance in them. Strangely, Carlo felt that he had never loved her as much. "We're going home, *bambina*," he said gently. "But first I must send a telegram to Palermo."

"Well, hello, signor! Remember me?"

Carlo stopped. On a seat under a palm tree—perhaps the same seat—Vittorio lounged, legs crossed, cigarette between fingers, smiling.

"Hello," Carlo said.

"Aren't you going to sit down and have a cigarette?"

Carlo sat down at the other end of the seat and gazed impassively at the young man, who thrust out a cigarette packet. Carlo hesitated, then took a cigarette and leaned towards the other for a light.

"Thanks."

"I was hoping I'd see you again," Vittorio said. "I want to thank you." He laughed.

"Thank me?"

"Yes. Remember that night I saw you before, two or three

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weeks back? You told me about a girl at the hotel Liguria. Well, I investigated, and, God, you were right! What a girl! *Beautiful!* She nearly drove me crazy until I got her."

"You got her, then?"

"Yes! I managed to smuggle her into the Hotel Roma one afternoon—I'd fixed it to have one of the rooms left unlocked . . . But the sad part is that I never saw her again. She left a message to say that she'd had to go back home unexpectedly—I never found out why. For a time I was desolated. Then I met another girl, though she wasn't a patch on—"

Carlo stood up abruptly. "Would you come for a drink with me?"

"Why, sure."

Carlo led him from the sophisticated glitter of the promenade to the old part of the town. They walked down the Via Petrarca, then turned into an even narrower and almost deserted street.

"Where are we going?" Vittorio asked nervously.

"Just along here."

They reached the opening of a dark, silent alley. Carlo gripped the other's arm and steered him firmly into it. They stumbled in the darkness for a minute, then Carlo pushed Vittorio back against a wall.

"Here—what—?"

"Now," Carlo said, "I'm going to tell you something. That girl you dishonoured is my daughter. I come from Sicily. You know what that means?"

"But it was you who—"

"I came to Portovecchio again to find you. Even here in the north they will understand. If they catch me I will only get a light sentence. Honour is honour."

Vittorio's mouth was open but he didn't speak, his eyes wide and incredulous at the gleam of the knife in Carlo's hand.

© Louis Battye 1967

☐ AN ARGOSY 'FIRST'. Louis Battye, whose work appears for the first time in Argosy, was born in 1923, at Holmfirth, in Yorkshire; but it was at Chailey, in Sussex, that he received his education, at the Heritage Craft School. He is the author of a volume of autobiography, and has had three novels published by Secker and Warburg: *The Narrow Shore, Cornwall Road,* and *Dark At Seven,* the last-named having appeared in October, 1966. Louis Battye is also an established contributor to many periodicals. His home is now in the county of his birth.

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An End To Running

BY LEONE STEWART

HE came down the dirt road, driving his jalopy from side to side, trying to miss the big stones that could cut a tyre down the middle with the sureness of a sharpened blade.

She had an idea this was the time he would come, just before six o'clock, when the heat of the day had spent itself and a cool breeze was getting up and heading this way over the hills.

Josh Canton had no time-table. Some days he missed out altogether, then he'd spring her, walking round to the back of the shack at five in the morning.

His visits didn't concern her as once they had. He was from

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the sheriff's office twenty miles away. He was deputy and now couldn't hope for the seat of power, though he went on running for it like he didn't know how to stop.

Kate Lowery wasn't a woman easily frightened. Too long she had lived alone, the nearest neighbour five miles off and the road empty of traffic for most of the day. Fear had to feed on imagination and long since Kate had stopped thinking along any lines that weren't practical and to do with her business.

Once a week the traveller came to collect her produce; eggs, soft fruits and vegetables. The income wasn't what it had been when Ben was alive, but then her wants were few and her only indulgence the rough cider she bought in great stone jars.

There was a glass of it in front of her now as she sat rocking in the old chair on the porch, watching the visitor leave his jalopy and come walking over the tufted grass towards the shack.

He should be sheriff, she thought. He would look the part with his big frame, his air of toughness, his lack of fear and those shrewd blue eyes that were all-seeing. He would be a good man in an emergency and fair, when power was in his hands.

He would never be sheriff now though, not a chance. The days were drawing in for Josh Canton. Some time you had to rest ambition and admit you'd gone as far as you were likely to. Yet a man like Canton might find that hard to digest.

She saw the gun in the holster. Once she hadn't liked the look of it, now it no longer bothered her. He would use it if he had to. This was rough country and the laws were rough in keeping.

"Hi, Ma." He came up the steps and tipped his hat to her. He always called her Ma, though in years there was little to count between them.

"There's an extra glass. Help yourself to cider."

He hesitated, tempted, a man with a good and ready thirst.

"Maybe later. First I'll take a look around."

The smell of him went past her, tobacco, sweat, earthiness, and his big boots left mud prints across the porch floor. Ten minutes, fifteen, that's how long he'd be gone, searching the three rooms of the shack, raking into every cupboard, the coal bunker and then the hen coops, the greenhouse.

Thorough, that's what he always was. When a man is convinced the way Josh Canton was, then nothing can shake him. Right from the start he had been sure; dead sure that Mike would make for here. His old home and his mother.

Kate rocked herself gently in the chair and felt the cool breeze on her face. It was welcome after the heat of the day. She had

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decided that if Canton called at early evening she'd suggest he stay to supper. There was a bit of cold pie in the larder and he might as well eat here as in the town. At home there was no woman waiting for him.

Kate had never offered more than coffee or cider before and even that had surprised Canton. He couldn't understand why she should want to give him hospitality.

From the porch she could hear him moving around the shack. If a mouse had been hiding he'd have found it.

She drank her cider and she didn't mind how long he stayed, an hour, two. Loneliness was a new experience for her; only since she had known Canton had it come upon her. It was after he had gone, after he had disturbed the silence and left rising tobacco smoke in the air and the sound of his gruff voice in her ears, that she noticed it.

A kind of emptiness, a vacuum. A wish that he had lingered longer. Yet his passport into her home was the police card that gave him authority. He did not call as a friend.

Canton was in the back garden now. She could hear the chickens squawking and she lifted herself out of the chair and went for the cold pie. She had it laid out on the table in the kitchen when Canton returned. It was still light and would be for the next hour, but the first shadows had crept into the room, darkening the corners.

Canton saw the two plates, the cutlery; he could smell the coffee and looked at the jar of pickles she was putting out.

"Expecting company?" he asked.

"No-one comes to see me these days, not socially that is. Folk around here scare easily; a breath of scandal and memories stay long. They fancy the place is being watched and neighbours see you go by often enough. No, the meal is for you and me, if you've a fancy for cold pie."

He was looking at the food, then down at his big boots. He was wondering if he should stay. He was on duty, self-imposed for the most part, of course.

"He's going to walk in here one day, Ma, and you're going to shield him and that could mean a lot of trouble for you."

When she didn't answer he sat down at the table and his gaze lingered on the pie. She read his thoughts. A long while since he'd tasted any real home cooking or had a woman to care if he ate or not.

She cut a generous slice, heaped it on to a plate and pushed it towards him.

"Help yourself to pickles," she said.

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"Ma, I'm going to keep on coming, I'm going to keep on coming right up to the time when I have to retire. One day he'll be here and then I'll take him. Not your kindness or home cooking will make any difference. He's a wanted man and the law says—"

"I know what the law says; the law says my son owes them ten more years of his life, the law says he must sweat in jail and slowly rot, looking out at the sky through shadowed bars; and when he gets his release, when the law has taken all it wants, he'll have shrunk till he doesn't know he's a man any more and there won't be a thing left to believe in."

Canton had started in on the pie and she poured the coffee. It was good to have a man sit at her table again and enjoy what she had cooked. Cooking was no credit to a woman unless it was appreciated and by the right person.

Canton had good table manners, nothing fancy, but decent the way Ben had and Mike, too. Once, long since, the three of them had sat round this same table at the end of a hard day. Mike had been a lad then with his head full of the future. He had such plans and she and Ben had listened, smiling, tolerant, hopeful for their son.

He would have his own farm and he'd build himself a good house and take a wife.

He had done all that, too, only the wife hadn't measured up to the dream picture. Kate had tried to tell Mike from the start that a girl that pretty doesn't settle easily, and when they had been married only a year Mike had found her in the barn with his hired hand.

Kate didn't think on from there. Always she called a halt when she reached that moment, like drawing heavy curtains when you know it's dark outside.

Canton finished off the pie, had three cups of coffee, lit his pipe.

"When he comes," he said, "you'll be wise to tell him to give himself up, Ma."

She was a tidy woman, but she left the dishes there on the table; a man didn't like a clatter, a sudden disturbance after he'd eaten well. There would be all the time to do the dishes after he had gone.

She ought to light the lamp, yet the act of that might bring Canton to his feet, conscious that he had lingered longer than he had intended. She wanted to delay him, to keep his company a little longer and postpone the loneliness ahead.

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"What would you have done," she asked softly, "in Mike's place . . . finding your wife in another man's arms?"

Canton considered, but not for long. "He had a fair trial, Ma. There's hanging in these parts for the killing of another man, but he got the sympathy of the court. Twelve years wasn't so harsh."

When you knew Mike as she had known him, twelve days locked away from the sunshine and clean air was more than harsh. He had suffered two years of it and then he had escaped. She didn't know how; the details weren't important.

"You'll be looking in again, I suppose." She walked with Canton down the steps from the porch. The lamp had been lit in the shack now and it gave out a thin stream of light so that clearly she could see the deputy-sheriff's face.

"Sure I'll be looking in again; sorry if I'm not welcome. It's the way it has to be."

"Yes," she murmured, "it's the way it has to be."

She watched him drive away and knew she would sleep well now. Once she had feared the big man, his eyes searching, the gun in its holster. Now his coming brought her a rare kind of peace. Asked to explain, she could not have done so; some feelings aren't explained that easily.

It was three days before Canton came again. Kate didn't hear the car. She was out in the garden, weeding the rockery and seeing the last of the sun glint on the broken pieces of china and sea shells she had placed there.

Canton had something in his hand; it was a scroll and when Kate straightened her back and looked at him he started to unwind the poster.

"I thought I'd bring this, Ma, maybe let you see it before you come across it accidental-like in the town."

"I seldom go into the town; not much point these days. Without my glasses I don't see too clearly. What is it?"

He held it up close to her face. "Police poster, Ma. The sheriff ordered a couple of thousand to be printed. We're displaying them all over."

The photograph was of Mike. It didn't do him justice. They had taken it when he'd been in jail. He wasn't smiling.

"Sorry and all that, Ma, but no man has slipped through our fingers before and stayed away this long; a lot of folk are asking questions. Not just the locals who keep on bolting their doors at night, but the city people. They reckon we should have caught him by now."

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"Yes," Kate said, "it doesn't look good for the sheriff's office. A man on the run all these months."

"It's good for no-one, Ma, and it's not good for you." A sudden softness brushed over the usual rough edge of his voice. "All this uncertainty, never knowing where the man is. It's not fair on a woman of your age. Trouble, that's all you've had."

"No," she said, "not all trouble. I had a good husband and a fine son. Not all women get to have such happiness."

She led the way into the shack, with Canton close behind her.

"Ma, wherever he is he'll see the posters, and when he does he'll realise someone's going to recognise him. He'll come home then, for sure. He'll need a place to hide and the sheriff won't take kindly to you if you harbour an escaped prisoner. Matter of fact, Ma, the sheriff was all for having men posted here, a round-the-clock vigilance. I talked him out of that idea."

"I guess you would do that, Mr. Canton," she said. "You want to take Mike yourself, single-handed. But it's too late, I'm figuring. Too late if it's a special kind of victory you're after. It won't give you the sheriff's chair now."

"That wasn't the whole idea. One man for one arrest. That's fair."

"Even if the hunter has the gun?" she said.

"I wouldn't fire, Ma, not unless I had to. Down our way we like to take 'em back alive."

While she made coffee he took a look around outside, and the table was laid with the cheese and bread when he came back. She noticed with satisfaction that he wiped his boots on the mat. He never had before. The courtesy pleased her.

Canton looked at the food and watched as she poured the coffee.

"For once I wasn't expecting you. If I'd reckoned you'd be dropping by I'd have made a good hot stew. This is all I have, but you're welcome."

"Maybe I shouldn't do this, accept your kindness when I can't be kind to you."

She smiled, indicated the chair opposite and sat down herself.

"I'm not bargaining, Mr. Canton; take the idea right out of your mind. I just happen to like a bit of company for supper."

They ate in silence and after Canton had lit his pipe Kate found her sewing.

"Guess I should be moving," he said. He was watching her fingers as she sewed and when she brought up her head from the work, he glanced away, a flicker of embarrassment in his eyes.

"Are you remembering, Mr. Canton," she said, "as I am

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remembering . . . pipe smoke and the quiet time of evening, just two people without a lot to say, yet with a lot between them that makes it a good thing just to be together?

"Ben wasn't a talking man, he never wasted words, he spoke out when he had to and left the rest. He was a deep man, my Ben, Mr. Canton; he didn't have a lot of learning, not if you judge by the school texts, but he did read, the same book over and over sometimes, when the fancy took him.

"He'd read out passages to me and he'd stumble a bit over the long words; he knew what they meant even if he couldn't always get his tongue around them. The point was—and important, I think—he didn't mind stumbling, he was never shy about it. Some men when they stumble, they can't accept it, can't face the fact they could be wrong."

She thought that would make him leave, and when it didn't she was glad. He didn't take offence easily.

The rain had come while they were having supper, slow at first but now rattling against the windows and beating at the shack doors.

When Canton eventually stood up to go she said, "There's an old mac that belonged to Ben; take that. It'll get you to the car."

On the porch steps he touched her hand briefly. "I wish it was anyone but you, Ma, anyone that I had to hurt the way I'm doing."

She watched him go out into the rain, head bent against the hard blow-back of wind. She stayed there, under the porch awning, waiting for the sound of the engine to start up.

When it didn't she knew it wasn't going to. There was no telephone in the shack and a twenty-mile walk back to town. Canton didn't give up easily. She had filled hot water bottles, made up a spare bed in the kitchen before he returned.

The rain was dripping off Ben's mac. It was a good fit, might have been made for Canton.

"Ma, I came to tell you. I'll have to start walking. That engine was due for a seizure and now it's had it."

"There's a bed here, Mr. Canton, comfortable enough. You can start walking in the morning. Not to worry about reputation. When a woman gets to my age and has known other kinds of gossip and bad talk, it isn't something to lose sleep over. If they want to stone me in their hearts they can."

"I can't stay," he said. "On a night like this he could come, thinking it safe, and I would have to take him. I guess I'd have an unfair advantage."

So there was fairness in the law, she thought, or perhaps only

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fairness in men like Canton. He had his rules, strange though they might be, only he would hold on to them as tightly as that gun in its holster.

"If I may I'll borrow the mac. There could be someone on the road and I'll hitch a lift."

"Please yourself," she said, "but if you go and Mike comes then you won't be here. And if he comes and you are here, then make a bargain with me."

He saw the reasoning, yet was slow to decide.

"A blind eye, Mr. Canton," she said, "is not a bad idea on a wet night."

In bed she listened to the beat of the rain and thought of Josh Canton in the next room, wakeful as she was perhaps, uneasy in the bargain he had struck. He would have kept to it, she knew, he would be a man of his word.

The bargain, of course, was unnecessary. If there had been the chance of Mike coming, then she would not have allowed the sheriff's deputy to stay the night. In spite of her trust, the element of risk would be there.

Mike would not be coming. He had already been.

On a night like this and worse, with rain drowning the countryside, he had fallen in at the back door; exhausted, ill, a man who had been on the run then for five weeks.

Kate had made him comfortable and warm. Hot soup, a spoonful at a time, and few words because he was so very tired. Even if she could have found and trusted a doctor she knew it would be a waste of time.

There had to be an end to running and what better place to reach than home? When Mike had felt like talking it was not of the present but the long-ago past, of fishing with his father, rides on his horse, racing over the fields in summer, climbing trees. Youth remembered and recalled with happiness, a time before the shadows had come.

She had kept in a good fire and they had sat close together in the light from it, wrapped in affection and a deep understanding.

He fell asleep with his head against her shoulder and she went on stroking his forehead until it was quite cold.

She did not cry nor yet deny him the release he had at last found.

Canton knocked on Kate's door the next morning. She got up, put on her dressing gown and found him standing there, awkward with a cup of tea in his hand.

"I sugared it. Was that right?" he said.

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It was a long while since anyone had made her an early morning cup of tea.

She took the cup, thanked him, and he went on standing there, apology on his face.

"I'm sorry, Ma, there was a bit of an accident. It was when I was getting down the cups from the dresser; I guess I'm a clumsy sort of guy."

She drank her tea, dressed and went to investigate the damage. There were a couple of plates broken and a mug.

It had belonged to Mike when he was a child. A great aunt had given it to him for his birthday and his name was printed in large letters on the rounded front. It was the one piece that had survived intact.

"I'll mend it for you," Canton said, hovering, uncertain, deeply embarrassed by his action.

"You can't put pieces together again, not when they are this far gone. Anyway, I wouldn't want you to; it was sentimental of me, keeping that mug. Mike hadn't used it since he was a little boy."

She felt Canton's hands fall on her shoulders and the grip was one of deep remorse.

"Oh, God, Ma, what have I been doing to you . . . all these weeks, months, walking in, not caring, searching, eating your food, sleeping in your home, taking, torturing you . . ."

"You've been doing nothing, Mr. Canton, save keeping me company. I've appreciated it. In fact your coming has been something to look forward to."

He swung away from her, his head down. "I won't be coming again, Ma, I'm taking myself off the case; they can sling me out if they like. I've done all the harm to you I'm going to do. If there's anything now, any favour or service, just say and I'll cover it for you."

"Thank you," she said, "yes, there is a favour. Please don't call me Ma any more. You see, Mr. Canton, I stopped being Ma a good few months ago."

She walked out into the garden. The rain had died away with the dawn and Kate went to the rockery.

She placed the piece of broken earthenware in the centre where the small flowers grew, then stood back, watching the rays of the morning sun touch the name of Mike.

When she felt Canton's hand slip into hers, she said, "Another favour. I would rather you said nothing in the sheriff's office. Be a pity, don't you think, to disturb my . . . rockery."

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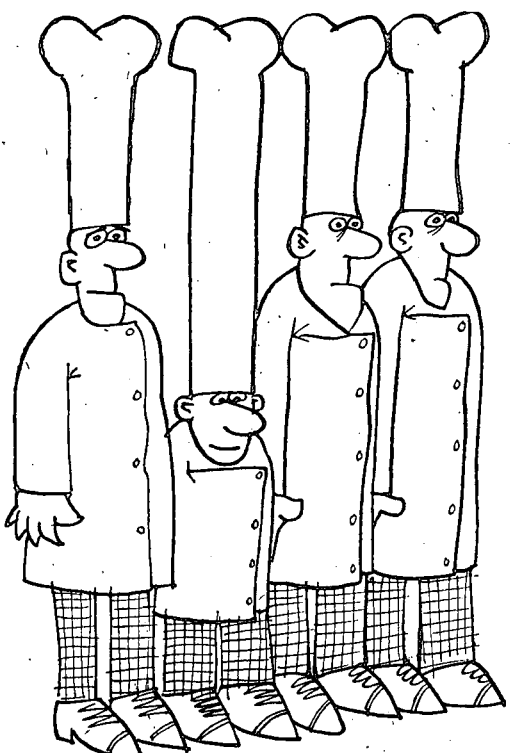
TOO MANY COOKS



A Culinary Comedy by ·MADDOCKS·

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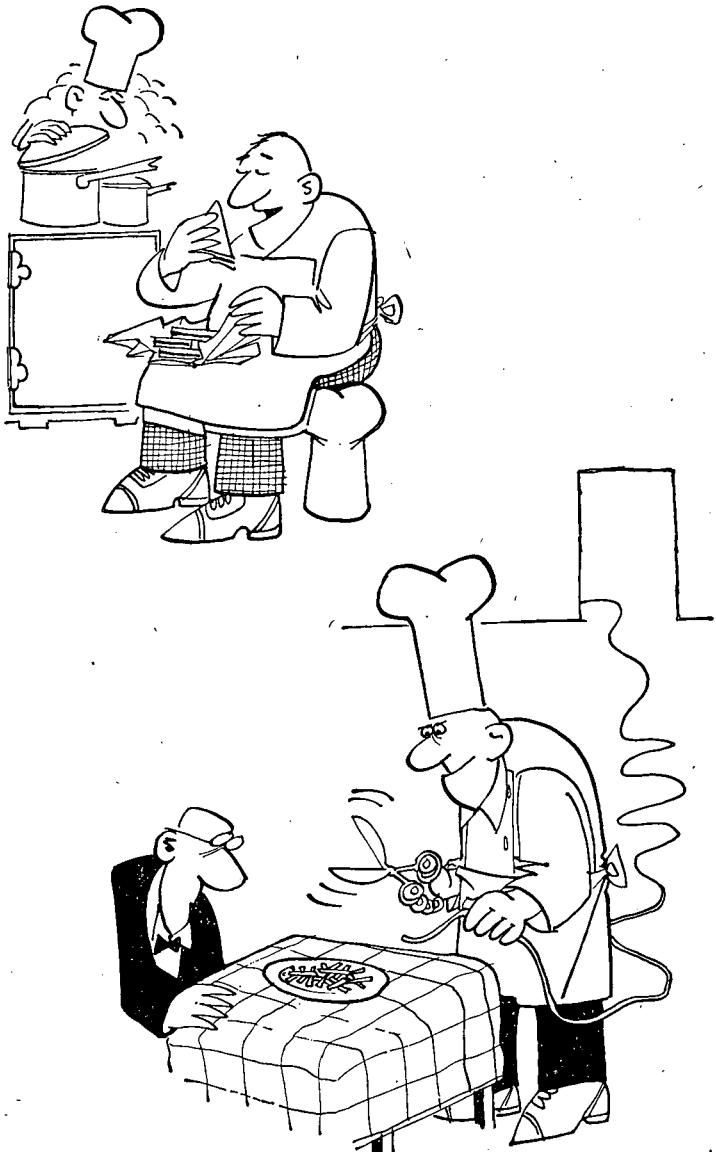

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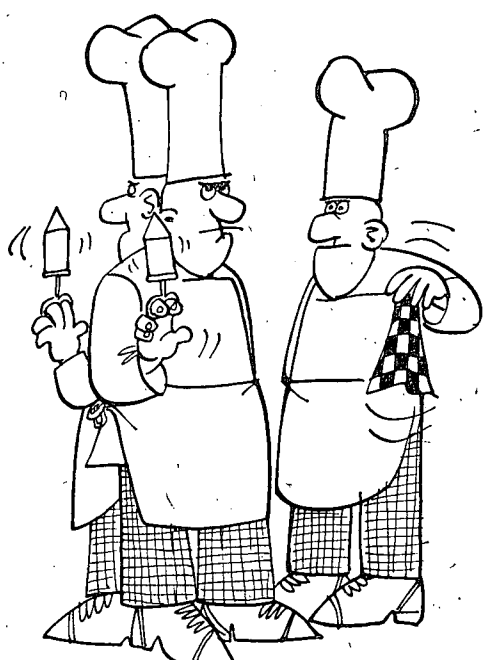

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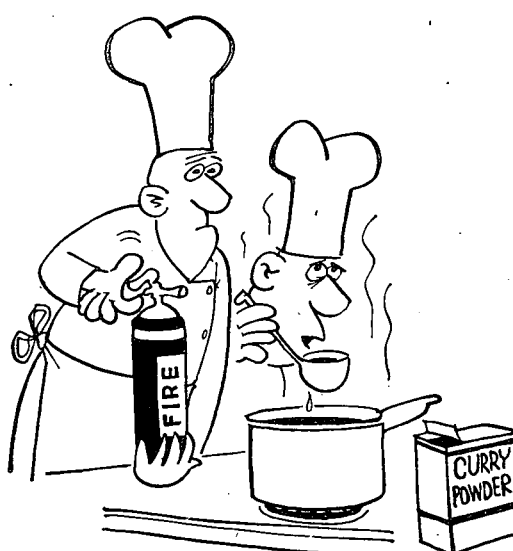

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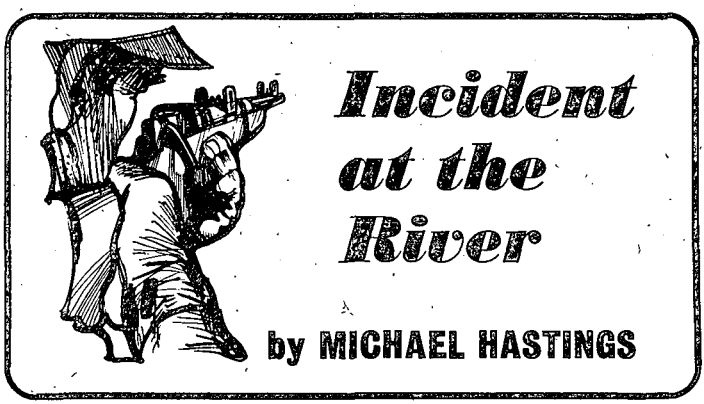
SWINE! . . . He's got his knife into me . . . never misses a chance!" Konrad was breathless, anger expressing itself in violent polishing of his boots. He wasn't making a good job of them; he'd neglected to dry the leather first. With one foot up on the bench he half turned, brush clutched in a grimy hand. "And Müller . . . standing behind him, smirking . . . enjoying every word."

Berg had only just come on duty; he was wet and chilled from walking a mile in rain so heavy that even where the road fringed the wood there'd been little shelter. He stepped closer to the small stove.

"All officers are swine and there's usually a creeper like Müller." He spoke with the slow, quiet resignation of experience. He'd learned that you have to live with the things you can't



alter; but Konrad was too young to understand. Sometimes Konrad's fire and impatience made Berg feel old.

"Of course my rifle was dirty!" Konrad shouted. "I was just back from patrolling the riverbank. It's bad along there tonight and I slipped and in saving myself I dropped the rifle in the mud. The way the swine carried on! And two hours' drill at eight o'clock sharp in the morning! If I'd done it deliberately, there might have been some cause . . ."

Berg bent over to poke at the stove and to hide a slight smile. "Frontier guards aren't supposed to slip," he said. He straightened up and looked at the younger man, critically but not without sympathy. "If only you could manage to smarten yourself a bit!"

Konrad finished using the brush. Then he stood to attention

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The escape boat must surely be this side of the river by now

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and looked at Berg expectantly. There was something pathetic, but at the same time irritating, about the young man.

"Not good," Berg said. "But as it's a filthy night . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "Clean them again in the morning."

He was anxious for Konrad to leave the small hut, but he dared not show his impatience. He couldn't risk Konrad blurting out, "Old Berg was in a hurry to get rid of me . . ." There was always somebody listening and words such as those would be enough to arouse suspicion.

"Waste of time cleaning them tonight," Konrad grumbled, joining Berg at the stove, "but it was an order. And orders must be obeyed, however stupid they seem!" He kicked the stove. "No heat in this rotten old thing. *He* didn't notice, of course. Only my rifle and my boots. Doesn't matter if we freeze to death, so long as our boots are clean."

"Steady," Berg murmured. This was one of the moments when the age gap between them seemed to expand, making him feel old enough to be Konrad's father.

He did, he supposed, have an almost paternal regard for the youngster.

"It gets me down sometimes," Konrad said. "And I can't help it. The way that swine picks on me! The trouble is I'm not used to looking smart. I've never had the chance . . . Do you know what my mother did the first time she saw me in uniform? She wept. She'd never before seen me in anything new! Ernst's cast-offs—that's what I had to wear. She always tried to make it seem right by telling me they were a present from my big brother. Of course, it didn't work. I mean, as far back as I can remember I hated him."

"Not his fault," Berg said. He was only half-listening, wishing Konrad would go.

"Yes, I understand that now; so I don't hate him any longer, but there's still something . . . I never visit him, and if I know he and his wife are coming to see Mother I manage to be out of the house."

Berg made an effort to appear interested. "A pity you can't get together and laugh over it." He went to the desk and made an entry in the log book, adding his signature. His hand was unsteady, betraying the state his nerves were in. He had to fight down an urge to shout at Konrad, throw something at him, anything to make him leave the hut. He managed to say quietly, "You've not signed off."

"Haven't I?" Konrad came back to the desk and wrote, laboriously, tongue out. "There!" He put down the pencil. "Nothing

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to report. There never is. That's why they've left us short-handed. We should have two on duty; not have to do it alone."

"Sickness," Berg said. "It's practically an epidemic."

"Even so I bet that swine could get someone to make it a little easier. Every third night is a bit hard! Don't you find it terribly lonely?"

Berg shook his head.

"You read a lot, don't you? I suppose it's a help, your brother being a teacher. He must have lots of books. And you're not like Ernst and me; you go to your brother's house as often as you wish. His wife and his daughter are glad to see you."

Berg said nothing. He was looking at his watch. Somehow he had to get rid of Konrad in the next ten minutes.

"It must be nice to have a home of your own. I think I'd like that. I'm not much good with girls, though; I mean, I can never think what to say, so I just stand there looking stupid. It would help if I could dance, but I've always been clumsy on my feet . . . Why haven't you got married?"

Berg struggled with sickening impatience. "I suppose I've never met the right girl." Inspiration came to him: "But I'm happy enough. There's my brother's family. And you—you've your mother. She'll be wondering what's happened to you, by the way. On a night as bad as this I bet she has something hot waiting."

Konrad grinned. "And dry socks put out. The way she fusses! She can't get it into her head I've grown up. When she looks at me she still sees a small boy." He became serious. "It's quite embarrassing sometimes . . . when other people are there."

"Mothers are like that," Berg said. Still persisting, he added, "It wouldn't surprise me if she's set out to meet you."

"You don't really think . . . Oh!" Konrad laughed loudly. "You're making fun of me!"

Berg realised he'd overdone it. He forced a smile. "Of course."

"But it's no joke. Honestly! On Sunday we had the Renners to dinner and do you know what? She told me I was bolting my food. Right out loud in front of the Renners. And I'd just been telling Frau Renner what an important and responsible thing it is being a frontier guard."

"Too bad." Berg turned away, afraid something of the almost unbearable tension would appear in his face. His watch showed him, relentlessly, that there was very little time left. Somehow he had to get rid of Konrad. But how? He couldn't think clearly.

At last, though, Konrad was making a move. Berg couldn't nerve himself to watch, but he was able to tell by listening. Konrad was always noisy; he seemed to stamp around the hut.

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Then his rifle must have slipped from his grasp. The heavy thump made Berg jump.

"Sorry," Konrad said. "Well, good night. Have a quiet watch."

"It's sure to be that. Nothing will happen," Berg lied. He marvelled that his voice was steady; the rest of him was suffering badly from the shakes.

"Good night," Konrad said again.

The door of the hut slammed.

The squelching steps died away quickly and there was silence except for a steady pounding which was Berg's heart. Although it was a cold night and the stove gave out only a little heat, he was sweating. "Pull yourself together, man," he whispered.

Mechanically, he began to straighten up the untidiness which it was normal for Konrad to leave. The bench dragged away from the wall, a crumpled newspaper and an enamel mug on the floor, even the lid left off the tin of boot polish. Near the stove, wrapping paper from Konrad's sandwiches. Coffee had been spilled and there was a smell of paraffin from careless filling of the two lamps. Berg thought he might heat some water later and wash the bare boards; but not now. It was time for more serious things.

He looked at his watch, waited for the minute hand to reach the half-hour, and then hurried to the door and opened it a few inches. He counted ten slowly, closed it, counted another ten and opened it again, the same few inches. He left it that way.

With the signal given there was nothing except the waiting. Only a few minutes ago he was sweating; now, as a chill gust of night air swept into the hut, he shivered.

The rain had ceased. He wished he could see what was going on out there in the darkness. Otto should be approaching purposefully through the wood, with Johann following. Over the river, on the west bank, there should be a boat, the rowers ready to push off and come across. Into danger and back again to safety.

Not that the danger was great. Otto had been so confident. "Do you think I'd get my own brother involved in this unless I was sure?" And then, with calm precision, exactly as though he were explaining something to his class, even pausing to remove his glasses and give them a quick polish, he'd outlined the plan.

Running over the details again—it must surely be for the hundredth time—Berg had to concede that the risks were slight. All the circumstances were favourable. The searchlight which normally slid its probing beam along the river, turning the

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blackness of the water into bright silver, was out of action. The engineers who could service it were all down with the sudden virulent sickness the doctors were diagnosing as influenza.

For the same reason the frontier guards were down to a third of their normal strength. There was no possibility of reinforcements; they were being demanded by everybody.

Otto had said, "On Tuesday night you'll be on duty alone. The searchlight's abandoned. The only danger-point is the post just south of you. And there Gruber will be on duty—alone. At the critical time you can telephone him and keep him occupied."

That was no problem. Gruber was a hypochondriac, convinced he would be invalided out if the doctors knew their jobs. One had only to ask after his health and he'd talk away, with melancholy satisfaction, for twenty minutes or more. His comrades were so weary of his ailments that they avoided him whenever possible.

So nothing should go wrong. But Berg's mind was heavy with anxiety. He had the good sense to appreciate this must partly be because he'd never defected from duty before. He'd obeyed orders for such a long time that it never entered his head to question them. He had no desire to shoot anyone, but it was an order that those trying to escape to the West must be shot.

It had come as a terrible shock when Otto had revealed himself as one of the people involved in such treasonable activities. More than a shock, for it had brought about a deep inner conflict. All his life he'd admired his brother, who was the clever one of the family.

Berg had always been the plodder, learning with difficulty, never winning a prize at school.

Even now, in uniform, with a clean record and long service, he had no hope of promotion. Otto, though, was a teacher, respected, a man with qualifications. How could Otto be wrong?

Berg was in a turmoil for all that. He'd done his best to dissuade Otto; but Otto had said, "It has to be. Johann's likely to be arrested any day. We have to get him out."

It wasn't easy to visualise Johann as an enemy of the state. Like Otto, he was a teacher; probably ten years younger. His special subject was literature and he was alleged to have written a few poems himself. Anna, Otto's daughter, giggling a little, had said they were addressed to Fraülein Klett, the new assistant at the library. Well, there was nothing wrong in that, Berg supposed. So what had Johann done?

Otto wouldn't say precisely. "The less you know the better. I can assure you he's not in the black market, or a member of a

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reactionary organisation, or saboteur. Nothing like that." But he added, "Sometimes clever people, like Johann, write articles for publication in the West, articles which earn official disapproval."

Berg knew nothing of such matters. The only magazines he ever saw were those which Konrad tucked away hurriedly; magazines which, a quick glance told him, were full of pictures of girls wearing little or nothing.

Berg shivered. With the door open and the cold wind blowing in, the hut was becoming like an ice-box. Yet in spite of that and of the chill feeling down his back, he was sweating again. His forehead was damp, his hands sticky. He promised himself he would never be involved in such a risky business as this again. Not even if Otto pleaded.

What was more, Otto must give it up. Berg couldn't remember a single occasion when he'd challenged his brother or opposed him in any way. So this decision was a momentous one and it showed, Berg realised, just how nervous he was feeling. Otherwise the thought wouldn't have entered his mind . . .

Someone was coming. He could hear the quick, running steps. Berg turned to the door and then, as it was flung open, he gasped in astonishment.

"Anna!"

She looked rather boyish, in jeans and wearing gum-boots. She had a short coat and a close-fitting beret under which most of her flaxen hair was pushed. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement and there was colour in her cheeks. Her lips were slightly parted after the exertion of running.

She closed the door. "Bet you didn't expect me, Uncle." Her voice was breathy.

"What's this mean?" Berg asked sharply. "Has your father sent you to tell me it's off?" That was what he wanted. He felt he'd never wanted anything so much as this in all his life. Just for it to be cancelled.

"Of course not. Johann, the poet, is with me." Anna pointed vaguely. "I've left him by the trees and I warned him not to move."

"You've brought him here," Berg said slowly. "Your father should never . . ."

"He's got a temperature. They sent him home from school early this afternoon. We're sure it's the 'flu; but we didn't dare call Dr. Vogler, because we'd hidden Johann in the house and you know what sharp eyes and ears the doctor has."

"And talks like an old woman with nothing to do. Yes, if he

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suspected something strange was going on it would soon be common knowledge. But I still say *you* shouldn't have come."

"There was nobody else—not at such short notice. Don't look so sour, Uncle!" She laughed. "It was easy! There weren't many people about in the rain. It was dark and Johann had his arm round me; so if anyone did notice it would seem we were lovers."

Sometimes Anna shocked Berg; she was so young and yet she seemed to know so much about life. There were moments when, if he hadn't known better, he'd have taken her for a bad girl. But in spite of sometimes being shocked, he was very fond of her. He often caught himself wishing she was his daughter, and perhaps that was why he was so frightened now. If only he'd been firm, refused to have anything to do with this business, then she'd be safely at home.

But it was too late for regrets. The only thing now was to get it finished as quickly as possible.

Berg went across to the field telephone. Then he looked at his niece. "You have a torch? You know what to do?"

"Two long flashes, one short one. Repeat three times. Don't worry so, Uncle. I can cope. This is exciting, an adventure."

"Glad you think so," Berg growled. Then he relented a little, remembering the time he and Otto had skated on this very river only a few hundred yards from the spot where, the day before, a boy had gone through the ice and been drowned. When you were young, he told himself, danger was exciting.

He managed a smile and said, "As soon as I get Gruber on the line . . ."

She nodded. "I'll be off, fast."

"And be careful," Berg said. He pressed down a switch and turned the handle quickly. After only a slight delay there was Gruber's voice, sounding a bit thinner on the telephone but unmistakable. It was a voice which nature seemed to have designed for complaining.

Berg said, "That you, Gruber? Berg here. You alone?"

Gruber replied, "I shouldn't be here at all; but that's the way it is. They're so short of men now that unless you're practically at death's door they just give you some pills and send you back on duty."

Berg looked at Anna, raising a thumb. She smiled, waved the torch, and hurried out of the hut. The door closed softly.

Gruber was saying, ". . . and in the mornings I feel worst of all. Do you know I often sit on the edge of the bed for ten minutes? Yes; just trying to get my breath. And after that,

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when I'm dressing, I have to keep stopping. By the time I've finished I'm about exhausted . . ."

Anna was probably with Johann by now, Berg thought. She was a slender girl with long legs and she could move fast. It was only a short distance from the edge of the wood to the riverbank. Not more than twenty yards. They'd make for a point between the hut and the generator truck which powered the searchlight. Then, as soon as the signal was given, the boat was to push off from the other side.

Gruber was rambling on, "I don't know how I manage to get here. I allow myself twice as long as it takes anyone else and when I do make it I have to sit for a quarter of an hour before I can do a thing. As for this nonsense of patrolling the riverbank! It's unreasonable to expect a man in my condition to do that. I just step outside and look around. Even that's very bad for me. The night air, you know . . ."

Berg was getting tired of holding the telephone. He reached for the bench and pulled it nearer so that he could sit down. Then he rested the elbow of his right arm on his crossed leg. With the telephone a few inches from his ear, Gruber's voice became small and ridiculous, reminding him of a record played on a toy gramophone. Years ago, when Anna was a little girl, he'd given her one as a Christmas present. He wondered what had happened to it and to the nursery-rhyme records. The boat should be coming across the river now. Berg brushed his free hand across his forehead. It came away wet.

Gruber was coughing. Berg brought the telephone nearer and said, trying to sound sympathetic, "That sounds bad."

He had to wait several minutes before Gruber was able to say, "That's how it takes me . . . Struggle to get my breath . . . Hold on a minute . . . get one of my pills . . ."

The boat must surely be this side of the river by now. Johann should be scrambling down the bank. Berg hoped Anna wouldn't stand out there, waving. He should have told her to come back to the hut the moment the boat arrived. Once here she would be perfectly safe, even in the most unlikely event of an officer doing the rounds. Fair enough for her to have brought him a message about his brother being ill, asking him to go there when he came off duty.

Gruber was back. "I've had it. Not that it'll do any good. I've lost count of how many I've taken during the last six months. If you ask me, they're a job lot that were bought up cheap . . . What was that?"

Berg knew. It was like a bullet searing into his body, except

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that there was no agonised spasm of the flesh. But the shock was there, paralysing him momentarily. Even his brain stopped functioning; but it started up again, accelerating, when there were two more shots.

"Did I hear something?" Gruber was demanding.

Berg shivered. It was as if splinters of ice were jabbing his spine. Somehow he managed to say, "I'll go out and investigate. I'll let you know." The voice didn't sound like his own and when he stood up he staggered. As he slammed down the instrument he told himself this was a nightmare; but reaching for his rifle he knew it was grim reality.

Before he could get to the door there were heavy steps and it was burst open. Konrad stood there, white-faced, staring at him, as though in the blackness outside he'd confronted a ghost.

"People escaping!" Konrad panted. "I don't know how many! Berg, it's . . . I mean, I never thought it would be like this." He gazed at his rifle, stupidly. "I fired three times . . ."

"Snap out of it!" Berg shouted, so loudly his voice seemed to shake the hut.

"My b-boot polish," Konrad stammered. "I'd forgotten to take it and I'll need it in the morning. So I rushed back and then as I rounded the corner of the wood I could just make out the people by the boat. I fired as I dashed forward. The boat pulled away fast; but I—I killed one, Berg. There was a splash of the body in the water and I got to the edge of the bank and flashed my torch."

Konrad stopped. Then in a hoarse voice he went on, "It was a girl, Berg! I could see her fair hair as she floated. I'm sure she's dead. She went under, I think. But a girl, Berg!" His eyes were staring, appealing. "A girl . . . Berg, I feel sick."

Konrad turned, groping his way outside. Berg was scarcely conscious of raising his rifle; but Konrad's back, slightly bent, was in his sights. Just a pressure of the trigger, even the pressure of a trembling finger. But Berg lowered the gun, shaking his head. He couldn't. Then he was alone and he could hear Konrad outside, vomiting.

Berg looked at his rifle. Whom should you kill? he wondered. When everything in you shrieks for vengeance, whom should you kill? There was the jarring note of the telephone. Automatically he picked up the instrument. Gruber's voice came along the line, thin and curious.

Berg made an effort. "Nothing to worry about," he said dully. "Just an incident . . ."

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A new voice appears in Argosy, with a story of love and misunderstanding

GO BACK, GO BACK!

BY MARY E. PEARCE

AS soon as he was on the moor and heard the sheep bleating, he knew he had been right to come back. The sound was the soul of the place, and the loneliness caught him by the throat.

There had been swaling on the lower slopes that winter. The new heather was a bright green amongst the black twists of the old, and he fancied he caught its scent through the tang of the charred brash. The bilberry was slower to recover, but further up, where the ground had not been burned, the wind-cropped bushes were clothed in pale, luminous leaves that had a sharp scent all their own.

When he reached the brow he turned to look down at the two farms. Between Incoats, set in the hillside below, and Sowdens on the far side of the beck, the new bridge was just visible and he could see his father coming across with the two dogs.

From Sowdens the lane went straight down to Cudstock. The village was hidden in the elms, but you could tell where the church was by the rooks circling above, and you knew just where the village ended by the smoke from the mills at the bottom. And beyond the smoke, the moors went up and out again, sometimes clear and close-looking, sometimes misty as now.

George Stansefield pushed through the gate above Incoats and climbed the edge of the moor. Michael went down to meet him, and the younger dog, Riley, came to sniff at his heels.

"Sheep have done well, haven't they?" said Michael.

"They've not done badly, I suppose. But Arthur Firth says there's signs of fly and I'm going up to take a look."

"I'll come with you."

"Nay, there's no need. Arthur's up there somewhere." George

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withdrew his gaze from wandering after the flocks. "You may as well enjoy your holiday, laiking a bit."

"It's a funny thing," Michael remarked. "There's sheep enough around Bramhall, but they don't mean the same, somehow. Happen it's just me, because I feel better suited here."

"Aye?" The one slow word was faintly sceptical. "But you'll soon stall, I daresay, and then you'll be glad to get back to your flat Worcester acres."

"I wanted to talk to you about that. I'm not aiming to go back, d'you see. I've come home for good."

"I'm dafter nor usual today, it seems," his father said. "Else I'm hearing things."

"I'm serious," Michael said. "All I need to know is if I'm wanted."

"It were never my idea, your going in th' first place. But what'll your mother say?"

"I'd have told her last night, only she didn't seem ower pleased to see me."

"She were taken unawares, that's all. You should have written you was coming. You know what women are."

"If I'd written," Michael said, "she'd have put me off like she did last year."

George stared at him. "Did she? It's first I've heard!" He was silent for a while, then: "She thowt it were best, I suppose. She's that set on your stopping down there with her own folk."

"What about you?" Michael asked. "D'you want me back at Sowdens or don't you?"

"Well, now," George said, and rubbed at his jaw with the handle of his stick. "I reckon I can find summat for you to do."

"I'll go down and talk to my mother."

Going down through Incoats he heard the pigs screaming under the wall and knew they were being fed. Hannah Firth was just below, fighting to keep her feet amongst the thrusting snouts. When she moved she saw him grinning at her from the bank and her head tilted back sharply. Her grey eyes scarcely changed.

"So you're back, are you?"

"Looks like it," he said, and leant his arms on the wall. "You've grown a good bit, I see. And you've learnt to feed pigs without tumbling in th' muck. D'you want any help?"

"No, I can manage." She caught up her second pail and emptied it into the trough. "I'm used to work. I'm not like your sawny southern girls."

"You're right there," he said mildly. "They'd at least have said thank you."

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The pail clattered to the ground and she stood erect, wiping her hands on the hessian that shielded her skirt.

"I suppose all Cudstock's going to be put to rights while you're here?"

"Well, I'll do what I can."

"You know all the answers, I dare say!"

"Nay, just one or two," he said.

Her manner puzzled him and his smile had become fixed; a defence only.

"Where's Betty Parkin?" he asked. "Isn't she working here now?"

Hannah stared at him and there was a pause.

"Betty got married," she said. "Don't tell me you hadn't heard!"

"I only arrived last night. I've not had all the news yet. Who's the lucky chap?"

"Jim Holroyd."

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "She'll be well suited, I dare say. And Jim's a good enough lad."

"He's better nor some," Hannah said, and turned away.

Michael stared after her, anger tightening his lips. But the mood that had settled on him on the moor was still strong and nothing could touch it.

"You'd always a sharp tongue and it's grown up with you," he called, and laughed, hoping the sound would follow her across the yard.

The shock in his mother's face was like fear, widening the eyes and deepening the lines about her mouth. It was the same fear that had constrained her welcome the night before and he struggled impatiently to understand it.

"I know you're disappointed, but I gave it a fair trial," he said. "Three years is enough to make up my mind."

"Weren't you happy at Bramhall? Didn't you get on with your uncle?"

"I were happy enough. But I don't belong down there."

She sat with her hands folded in her lap. Her eyes searched his face.

"You didn't get into any trouble, did you? Is that why you came back so suddenly?"

"Trouble?" he repeated. "Nay, why should I have got into trouble?"

"I just wondered," she said, and looked away. "I can't understand why anyone should be wanting to leave Bramhall, that's all."

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"Well, look," he said. "You've never felt you belonged here, even after all these years, have you? You've never settled. Well, I feel the same about Sowdens as you feel about Bramhall. I'm better suited here."

"I don't know how anyone could prefer this place. It's so hard. If you'd stayed at Bramhall I might have—" She broke off and looked at him. "It would have been a link—with the old life."

"You've links enough," he said with a smile. "Aunt Grace is always sending you Bramhall news."

Intuition told him suddenly what she had been about to say and he felt a prick of anger.

"You thowt if owt happened to Father you'd have joined me down there, is that it? Well, Father's older than you by a good bit, I know, but when he's gone you'll have a few things to be sorry for, think on."

"I know that. You've never heard me complain of your father, have you?"

"You've nowt to complain of," he said.

He was making for the door when something made him pause. He saw the pain in her eyes and his anger left him.

"Don't you want me at home?" he asked. "Aren't you pleased to have me back?"

She glanced up at him with a thin smile. "Yes, of course."

George found four sheep dead on the moor and brought their fleeces down on his back.

"I've never known th' fly this early afore. It's ower warm, that's th' trouble. But Arthur's worse off nor that. He's lost ten."

"I wonder you've not dipped afore this." George gave him a sardonic, sideways glance.

"Happen I would have done if you'd come home sooner," he said. "But Arthur's starting on th' first lot in th' morning and you can help me bring th' rest off th' moor, first thing."

When they drove the flocks into Incoats fields, Arthur Firth had finished dipping the first sheep and they stood reeking of antiseptic and steaming in the sun. Hannah helped them herd the flocks into the hurdle fold and Arthur got down from the edge of the dip-bath to speak to Michael.

"Eh, we can use another pair of hands, we're that throng. You've come just reet, lad, even if you have brought this mucky weather!"

"You can't blame me for that, Mr. Firth. It's heat-waves all over."

"Tropics isn't in it," Arthur complained, sweltering in his mackintosh. "I've hawf a mind to take a dip mysen."

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"I thowt you awready had," George said. "You're wet enough and you smell worse nor th' infirmary."

"Let's have th' first of this lot and get on," Arthur said. "Anyone'd know it were one of yours, it's that scraggy!"

"I only lost four to th' fly, any road," George answered. "Not like some folk! And mind you keep them under for th' full three minutes or I'm like to lose a few more."

Arthur looked across at Michael. "Tongue like a schoolmaster," he said. "And you've come back to it, lad! Now with me, it's th' other way. I get all th' nagging from my daughter."

"Aye," Michael said, aware of Hannah somewhere behind him. "I can well believe it."

"How's it feel to be back?" he was asked whenever he went down to the village. "Think you'll settle down, like?"

"I'll settle," Michael told them. "Sometimes I feel as if I've never been away."

It was only half true, for every home place held a special magic for him, and he went from one to another with a sense of discovery. But amongst the people, the gap was soon closed. They accepted him as they accepted the cuckoo; a surprise to be remarked on, but soon forgotten. He liked it that way.

As soon as they had cut their hay the weather broke and there was rain.

"There would be," George said. "It's never failed us yet, that I know on."

On the first clear day, Arthur Firth came over to help, bringing Bill Thwaites from Laithroyd with him, and they opened up the haycocks in the field above the beck.

"I suppose you'd a baler for th' hay in Worcestershire?" Bill asked Michael.

"Don't be daft!" Arthur said. "They've nowt as common as hay there! They feed their cattle on asparagus and apples."

"Get away!" Bill said.

"I suppose these are toy fields compared with your uncle's?" Arthur said, pausing to look at Michael. "How many acres had you under hay down there? A thousand?"

"A tidy few. Bramhall was eight hundred acres all told."

"There now! And that'd be just a bit of a smallholding by Worcestershire standards, I daresay!"

Michael looked up and caught Arthur winking at Bill Thwaites.

"I see you've a hayseed in your eye, Arthur! Or is it a cast and I hadn't noticed afore?"

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"When you've done laiking," George called, "you'll happen get on with a bit of work."

Hannah came and joined them when she had finished in the house. Michael saw her crossing the beck and turned so that his back was towards her as she came up the field. He had got into the habit of ignoring her whenever possible, for her edged remarks had a way of getting under his skin.

"What are th' girls like in Worcestershire, Michael?" Arthur, passing across the field, nudged him with his rake-shaft. "Eh, th' lad's as deaf as a doorknob! I said, what are th' girls like in th' south, then?"

"Much th' same as anywhere," Michael said.

"Speak as you find!" Hannah called, and he turned to look at her in feigned surprise.

"I am," he said. "There's some reet nice girls down there and a few leetskirts, too. And there's shrew-mice," he added deliberately, "just like there is here."

"That's it, Michael, don't take owt of her miff-maff," Arthur said. "If Hannah's not careful she'll be a reet vinegary old maid in no time at all."

"Less nor that," Michael said, and Arthur laughed.

"Happen you can do summat about it, lad."

"I'd like to see him try!" she exclaimed.

Michael saw that she was angry.

"Nay, I'd liefer tame tigers," he said, sauntering to his next haycock. "I've a regard for my skin!"

He began to scale out the moist, sweet-smelling hay, feathering it on the wind so that it spread evenly over the ground, and the work eased away the tension that Hannah's presence had induced in him.

She was nobbut a bit of a lass, after all. He'd nowt to fear from her so long as he kept his head. They'd played together as children and he'd not stood any miff-maff then.

He began to whistle softly, feeling suddenly free.

"You sound happy," Bill said.

"Aye, why not?" Michael answered.

One day when he went into the house he found his mother sitting with a letter in her hands.

"It's from Grace," she told him.

"Oh, aye! How's things at Bramhall?"

She looked at him, her fine-drawn face set in hostile coldness.

"She says Hay was disappointed at your leaving. She says he planned to leave Bramhall to you."

"I know that," he said quietly. "Uncle Hay talked about it and

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I told him I didn't mean to stay. That's why I came away when I did. It seemed only fair."

"I don't understand you," she said hopelessly. "Letting such a chance go by. I just don't understand."

"You don't try," Michael said.

Toplaws had been a farm once, but the moor had reclaimed the steep fields, and the house was derelict. It was a place that had drawn him as a boy and it had been at the edge of his mind ever since his return. He came to it as a child comes to the last and best of a series of gifts.

A small rain blew like smoke across the moor and the air was full of the smell of the peaty turf. There was always a wind up there and he could hear it singing in the starved leaves of the thorn tree near the house. The turf at the door was smooth, cropped by the sheep that sheltered there. Three of them lolloped off up the slope as he approached and he heard them crying to their lambs.

He sat on the broken field-wall under the thorn, watching the movement of the wind in the flowering grasses below. It was a wild, lonely place and he savoured the wildness, feeling the familiar catch in his throat.

He saw her coming when she was still a long way off, and had time to drive away the black dog that lurked in the recesses of his mind whenever she was near to taunt him. He waited, his thoughts neatly marshalled, and when she came he was able to smile, confident of his detachment.

"Fancy meeting you," he said. "And at Toplaws, too. I'm glad you keep an eye on the old place."

"I'm on my way to Ogden. I didn't come just to look at a ruin."

"You wasn't allus so snooty. Your house, you used to call it, and you filled up th' cracks in th' walls and you lit a fire in th' stove."

"I've grown up since then."

"Awreet, Grannie Good Years, mind how you go on that path, it's ower brant for elderly feet."

She walked past him, her hair blowing in dark, damp wisps about her face, and he studied her dispassionately.

"You've not been to see my mother since I came back," he remarked, "and you was thick as thieves one time."

"I've been busy."

"Oh, aye." He looked up at her as she stood in the gap in the wall. "I'm home for good, you may as well know. D'you mean

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to keep away because you don't like th' shape of my nose?"

"I'll be over some time," she said, and turned up the path.

"Aye, do," he said. "She's not ower throng with company, as you know."

She was gone over the brow in a few minutes and Michael still sat, feeling the loneliness return.

He was bringing a few strays through Ayscoller when Gordon Hartley, the keeper, stopped to talk to him outside The Fleece.

"Come and have a drink, Mike lad. I've not seen you to talk to since you got back."

"What'll I do with th' sheep, then? Herd them in th' tap-room?" Michael asked. "Thanks, Gordon, but I'll happen call in at Th' Herders one neet. That's your usual place, isn't it?"

"I'm in and out," Hartley said. "I like to keep an eye on th' chaps there and then I know they're not poaching my moor."

"It's th' chaps that isn't there you want to worry about," Michael said.

"Aye, that's what I mean."

A man came out of a cottage on the green and made for the inn. He would have ignored them but Michael said, "How do, Mr. Parkin. I hear your Betty's gone and wed Jim Holroyd."

Jack Parkin looked at him with a sour, wooden face. "Aye."

"I were down in Laithroyd a day or two since," Michael said. "I passed Jim's place but I didn't see owt of Betty."

"Happen she saw you first," Parkin answered, and pushed past into the inn.

Michael stared after him and Hartley said, "Take no notice, lad. Jack were allus a funny-igged chap. Happen he got out of bed on th' wrong side."

"Happen he did," Michael said.

The same day he went over to Incoats and found Hannah baking in the kitchen. "Is your father here?"

"If you can see him he's yours," she said. "But as it's market he'll be in Flockfield, won't he?"

"Eh, then I'll leave him there!" Michael said, and stood with his hands in his pockets, staring at the baking tins on the table. "Those look good enough to eat. I'd allus a weakness for lardy cake."

Hannah stooped to take a pie from the oven and rattled it on to the table.

"It's not your only weakness," she said, speaking over her shoulder.

"You've got it in for me, haven't you? You've looked sideways

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at me ever since I came back and I'd like to know th' reason why!"

Hannah turned towards him, hands on her hips, her face flushed from the heat of the oven.

"You expect a warm welcome from everyone, do you? Brass band and a fatted calf and all!"

"Nay, I were never bothered about brass bands," he said.

She moved to push past him and he caught her by the arm. His anger, so long banked down, flared suddenly.

"I'm nowt special, I'm well aware! But I've had just about enough of this," he said.

"Take your hands off me! I'd liefer be touched by a lizard!" She wrenched free and stepped away, brushing her hair from her forehead. Her eyes were very grey in her flushed face. "You're not wanted here! You'd do better to go back where you came from! Or did it get too hot for you there, too?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You came back a bit sudden, didn't you? Happen you left Worcestershire for the same reason you left here!"

"If I knew what you was talking about we'd happen get somewhere," he said.

"You know well enough," she answered, and her voice was sharp with contempt. "I'm talking about the bairn you went off and left Betty Parkin with!"

He stared at her, his face blank and still.

"Betty had a bairn? Afore she wed Jim Holroyd?"

"As if you didn't know!"

"Well, well," he said slowly. "So I'm a father, is that it?"

"You can smile! I dare say you think it's clever."

"If I'm the father of Betty's bairn I'm damned clever," he said grimly, "for I've never been nearer Betty Parkin than I am to you."

He turned and walked out.

His mother was in the back kitchen, cleaning the separator. When he pushed open the door it slammed against her foot and she looked up with startled eyes.

"How many folk in Cudstock think I got Betty Parkin into trouble?" he demanded, and saw the colour fade from her face. "You for one, that's plain," he said bitterly.

She stood quite still, leaning forward with her hands against the bench. "Do you mean it isn't true?"

"Not one word. You can believe it or not as you like." His anger was hard and cold, proof against her tears. "You let me

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go off to Bramhall thinking like you did. You hastened my going, I remember, and you wasn't best pleased when I came back. Now I know why."

"I thought it was better for you to go. I didn't want you ruining your life, marrying that girl."

"Well, you made me look guiltier nor ever, didn't you? Just through Betty telling a lying tale to hide some other chap."

"Not everybody knows."

"Who, then? Hannah Firth and Betty's father that I know on!"

"They're the only ones," she whispered. "Betty told Hannah and Hannah spoke to me. I shall tell them it isn't true."

"You needn't bother yoursen, they'll not likely believe it now," he said. "But what about my father?"

"I never told him."

"That's what I thowt, for he'd never have kept it to hissen." He paused, his hand on the door. "He's got a bit of sense, has my father," he said.

He sat under the thorn at Toplaws and watched the shadows of the clouds moving over the coloured slopes. Behind him, somewhere high on the moor, a grouse was calling and its cry came down faintly on the wind.

When he saw Hannah coming he would have moved away, but he knew she had seen him and so he waited, enclosed in a mood that nothing could touch.

"I saw you on your way up," she said. "I called out, didn't you hear me?"

"Nay, I'm ower deaf today."

She stood before him, leaning against the wind, which furled her green frock about her legs. She was breathless from her climb.

"I've been over to Laithroyd," she said. "I've been talking to Betty Parkin."

"Not for th' first time," he answered.

"I got the truth this time," she said. "I might have known the other for a tale in the first place."

"You might," he agreed. "But folk allus believe what they choose to believe." He stared past her, his eyes narrowed to the wind.

"You're not making it easy for me to say I'm sorry, are you? That's what I followed you for."

He turned to look at her. "I'll take it as said, then. It'll save bother all round."

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"I can see I may as well go," she said angrily, and he nodded.

"I've a mind for solitude," he said.

She hesitated a moment, then turned and walked away down the path.

He got up and went into the open, derelict house, where the beams and joists lay like spillikins across the fallen stones. The place smelt of damp earth and rotting wood, and the wind whined in the mortarless walls.

He stooped and began to hurl the stones out through the doorway, intending to repair the field-wall outside. The work released his mood and he spent himself in hurling the stones as far as his strength would send them. Then his foot slipped between two tilting slabs and he stumbled, catching at a beam as he fell.

It caught him between the shoulder-blades and sent the breath from his lungs in a gasp. He fell headlong through the doorway and the beam, wedged between the porch walls, pinned him down. His foot was caught fast between the slabs and when he moved the hot pain told him that his ankle was crushed to the bone.

The cropped turf was cool under his palms and he laid his face down against it, laughing weakly. When he raised himself again he could see Hannah, small in the distance, making for the gate above Tupden. In another minute she would be gone down into the clough and he thought, Let her go! You'll not ask her help, will you?

But his anger had gone, leaving only weakness and pride. And pride would be a poor comfort in the hours of waiting for his father to find him.

He filled his lungs and cried out in a great voice that echoed in the derelict house and went out on the wind blowing down from the moor. The effort strained every muscle in his body and the two slabs moved, tightening the trap on his ankle. Pain made his senses swim and he peered down the hill, where Hannah, fringed in a strange light, was climbing swiftly back up the track.

For a moment he fought against the darkness. Then he laid his head down on the turf. Hannah had heard and was coming. He didn't have to fight any more. The darkness could have him till she came.

© Mary E. Pearce 1967

☐ ARGOSY DEBUT. Mary E. Pearce was born in London in 1932 but in more recent years has lived in Yorkshire and Cornwall, and is now in Worcestershire, where she finds the upkeep of her seventeenth-century cottage "an engaging hobby". She has worked on a flower farm, in a guest house, a factory, a library and in a variety of offices.

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R·I·P·

BY GEORGE MIKES

IS there any justice in this world? Do people in their life—and in their death—get what they deserve? Sometimes I am inclined to believe that they do.

I went to visit a charming old lady in the West Country, a widow for twenty-seven years. Even after so many years she spoke of Basil, her deceased husband, with a candid lack of affection.

Her son suggested that we should go and see the old man's grave. The lady was noticeably surprised, even taken aback, but after a moment's hesitation, she consented. We walked to the village cemetery and found the old man's grave in a deplorable state. It was overgrown with shrubs, creepers, and weeds. The grave was a sorry mess; it seemed it had not been attended to for twenty-seven years.

We were all deeply embarrassed, and remained silent.

At last the old lady spoke, "Well, Basil never liked gardening."

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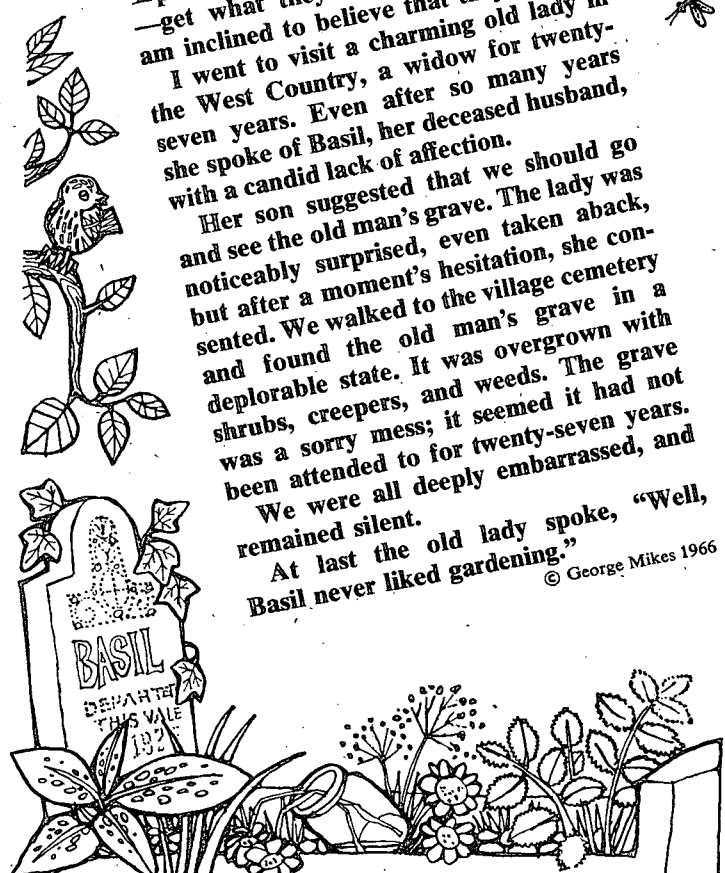

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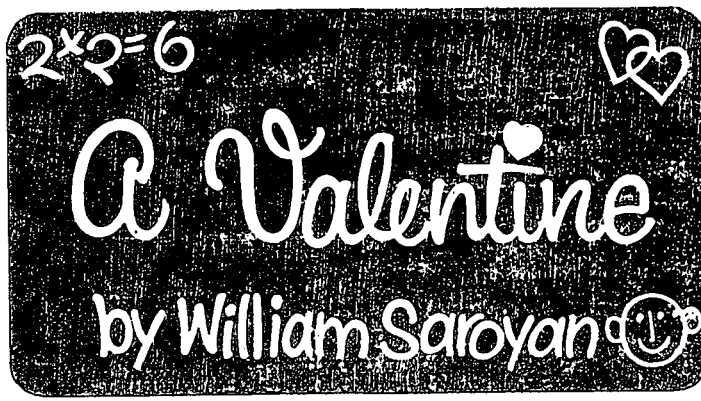

BREATHES there a man with soul so dead that in his heart has never said, This is my own, my native land . . ."

The foregoing is a garbled version of a piece of American * writing I chanced upon fifty years ago at Emerson School in Fresno, and immediately loved for its simplicity, truth and warmth; loved so deeply that I found it impossible not to invent parodies of it, which nevertheless did not diminish my admiration for the original:

"Breathes there a man with foot so flat that in his flight from the water-melon patch has never said, This is my own, my very own water-melon, farmer. Don't shoot a good American boy doing his plain American duty!"

Or: "Breathes there a man with heart so heavy that in the summer has never said, This is my time at last to dive and swim or sink, and then walk home in bare feet, with a stick of hay in my teeth to help me think!"

The thing I liked about the piece of writing was the grand arrangement of the first four words, *Breathes there a man*, which had the effect of making me feel, Now we're *talking*. And made me believe I could talk that way, too, and probably ought to, for the good of my own green soul.

In ordinary everyday speech I had never heard anybody say anything in any such poetic manner, but now I knew it could be done, and therefore it was no longer necessary to imagine I

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* *Argosy footnote: American writing, Mr. Saroyan? The misquotation is surely from "The Lay of the Last Minstrel", by that well-known non-American writer, Sir Walter Scott.—Ed.*

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would have to speak English as I had heard others speak it: I could speak it as others had *written* it.

I could speak *writing*: Dreams there a dreamer a dream more impossible to talk about than my dream of you, Maxine of the second grade, two desks forward, one aisle to the left?

The answer: No.

My dream of Maxine was not only impossible to talk about—I couldn't even write about it; but on Valentine's Day in 1916 when I was eight I tried to draw a picture about it: a heart with an arrow in it under the carefully-printed name Maxine. Below the heart was a great white space for my name, the adorer of the dumpy, stumpy, lazy, lumpy, light-headed, lisping angel who had come directly from the spheres to enchant and torment me, although she lives in a hovel on Santa Clara Avenue near O Street, and is the daughter of an Irish day labourer.

There was space for my name as well as my message, but when I moved pencil point, eye and nose, secret and soul, to where I might begin to engrave the first letter of my name, I was stopped cold in my tracks. I couldn't write my name.

I couldn't print the first initial of my first name, even, because in that great miracle, that great love, that great dream of Maxine, I was simply nothing—a total stranger, an outsider, an immigrant who actually wanted to invade a dimension in which he would be a crude clown, a rude fellow, an astonisher of the order of law and love, who would have to be laughed at or politely told to go back.

Who was I to think that I could send my drawing of love and adoration and my name and message to the Miracle of the Ages, Maxine Herself? William? Saroyan? How ridiculous and unfortunate each name was. How wrong, how hopeless.

I could talk *writing* all right, but I couldn't talk *love*. It was too big for language, line, sign, mark, engraving, letter, whisper, word, song, dance, glance or thought, even; although for a while I expected thought to do what nothing else could.

I believed my dumpy little darling would find arriving into her own mysterious thinking-and-feeling processes the thought of my love, and one day would suddenly turn, look at me, and be as enchanted about me as I was about her. She would get up from her desk, come to me, and I would get up and take her by the hand and walk out of the room with her, out of Emerson School, out of the public school system of Fresno, California, and out of the whole rigmarole of trying to get people to find out about love by sending them to school. Maxine and I *knew* love, we *had* it, straight from the holy source of it, so we didn't

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need to go to school any more. I thought my deep long thought of love, and I waited for it to arrive in Maxine, so we could recognise one another and get the hell out of there.

But after three full long January weeks of total failure, I began to suspect that the dream of love that had come unaccountably into my life couldn't be directed into hers.

I waited, and then I stopped waiting. *That* wedding just wasn't happening. Was it possible that it would never happen—all her life, all my life, all of everybody's life? Was it possible that it simply *couldn't* happen? Couldn't we ever know something as simple as that without words? Couldn't we know it at just the right time because it was true? Always had been and always would be? Well, it looked as if we couldn't.

There seemed to be simply no communication between people except by means of words, spoken or written, and so on Valentine's Day I began to make a valentine for Maxine, only to discover that my love was so great, mysterious, everlasting, hopeless, crazy, true and one-sided that I couldn't sign the valentine, not even with my initials, not even with *Guess Who?*

And yet she was the only girl in the whole world for me, so what was a man to do about that?

Well, I would do something, most likely, something in writing, most likely, because if the substitute communication *was* language, then that would be the thing I would be concerned about for the rest of my life. I would try to find out how to make the substitute communication that is in words as near as humanly possible to the real communication that is not in words. I would find out how to send valentines to Maxine—and to everybody.

I received a few valentines from girls I didn't like. I passed along a few to a few others I didn't dislike as much as I disliked the girls who had sent me valentines, and I signed them *Guess Who?* or *You Know Who* or *Al Nidevar*, because I knew Al Nidevar despised that particular girl, and if we couldn't have love, maybe we could have laughter.

The valentines that came to me I shoved into the pocket of my overalls because they weren't from Maxine, but every now and then during the rest of that day, while I was selling papers, I brought them out and looked at them and put them back, and thought about them and about the girls who had drawn them and sent them, and then sure enough, little by little, a kind of rather meaningful thing happened: I no longer disliked the girls who had sent me the valentines. I rather liked them, in fact. They weren't Maxine, I really didn't know *who* they were, but I rather liked them just the same.

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And I knew the valentines didn't mean that they liked me, they meant something else—maybe something like, "Well, here we are, stuck with ourselves, not in love with one another the way anybody knows love really is, but what do we care, it's still pretty wonderful to be who we are, anyhow." And so I was glad I had been sent three valentines, and that I had sent four.

Love doesn't have to be perfect. Even imperfect, it is still the best thing there is, for the simple reason that it is the most common and constant truth of all, the very thing that holds everything together, that permits everything to move along in time and be its wonderful or ordinary self. (A rose is its own self, for instance, but no more its own self than a cabbage is its own self, although it's only a cabbage.)

Breathes there a man with memory so feeble that on Valentine's Day his soul is not gladdened by sending to somebody a substitute message of his real love, or delighted by the arrival from somebody of the same substitute message?

The answer: If he's still breathing, he's still in love.

Say I'm a liar, say this valentine is a lie, I still say I love you.

Guess Who?

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WHISKY GALORE!

WHO WERE THE WINNERS?

The tregnums of Long John Scotch Whisky, offered for the first three correct solutions to our December Crossword opened on the 9th December, were sent—in time for Christmas—to:

Miss D. P. Bryden, Albert Road, Brighton, Sussex.
Mr. M. J. Baskett, Charles Street, Oxford.
Mr. J. V. B. Gray, Mountain Road, Caerphilly, Glamorgan.

WHAT WAS THE SOLUTION?

ACROSS. 1, *Managing.* 5, *Smacks.* 9, *Draw lots.* 10, *Skills.* 12, *Speedwell.* 13, *Alike.* 14, *Ales.* 16, *Whippet.* 19, *Oversee.* 21, *Slew.* 24, *Torch.* 25, *Elaborate.* 27, *Seesaw.* 28, *Off and on.* 29, *Assets.* 30, *Departed.*

DOWN. 1, *Modish.* 2, *Neater.* 3, *Gelid.* 4, *Nutmegs.* 6, *Make a pile.* 7, *Calliope.* 8, *Suspects.* 11, *Flow.* 15, *Lose heart.* 17, *North Sea.* 18, *Fearless.* 20, *Ewer.* 21, *Snaffle.* 22, *Bandit.* 23, *Penned.* 26, *Omaha.*

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For the first time, MICHAEL GILBERT opens files on Calder and Behrens in a new three-part series . . .

AGENTS IN ACTION

Calder and Behrens always spell action! Now, the most recent exploits of this special security team are brought to light in an exciting three-part series, especially written for Argosy. Also, Michael Gilbert makes known in this and succeeding issues the secrets of their security dossiers. Authenticity of detail has always been the hallmark of Gilbert's work; and now he fills in the gaps in the lives of his characters who have become favourites with many Argosy readers. In "Upon the King", the first of the series, Mr. Behrens finds himself caught in a trap to catch a king that challenges all his skill, nerve and ingenuity.

PLEASE TURN PAGE

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BEHRENS

SAMUEL BEHRENS

Born 1910. Second son and fourth child of Alfred Behrens and Marie Messenger, of Highgate, London.

EDUCATED: Shrewsbury (Oldham's House), London University and Heidelberg University. Specialised in European languages.

TAUGHT AT Munich High School 1930-32, Baden-Baden 1932-33, Leipzig 1933-35, Berlin 1935-39.

LANGUAGES: (A)+ Standard German
(A) Standard French
(B) Standard Greek, Italian, Russian.

WAR SERVICE: Still classified. (It has been mentioned in "Reminiscences" of Franz Molbach, Bonn 1963, that Behrens was in Germany for two months prior to the first attempt on Hitler's life and supplied the sabotage device which failed to detonate in the Fuehrer's plane. This is neither confirmed nor denied by F.O.)

JOINED J.S.S.I.C. (E) 1956.

SPECIAL INTERESTS: Bee-keeping, chess.

CLUBS: Dons-in-London.

RESIDENCE: The Old Rectory, Lamperdown, Kent. Lamperdown 272.

BLOOD GROUP: O. Rh+

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AGENTS IN ACTION by Michael Gilbert

UPON THE KING

GOUGH, who was eighteen and a half, weighed eleven stone, and had dark red hair and a dark red temper, opened the door of his study and shouted "Fa-a-a-g" in a voice which would have done credit to a sergeant-major in the Brigade of Guards.

The sound floated along the corridor, descended the stairs, and penetrated the Day Room, in the far corner of which a thin boy, of indeterminate age, with a serious, coffee-coloured face and wiry black hair was sitting on the hot-water pipes reading, for the third time, an airmail letter which had a foreign stamp on it.

He was so intent on what he was reading that the sound took a few, fatal seconds to register. Then he stuffed the letter into his pocket and hurled himself out of the room.

"Last again, Thorn," said Gough. "You're a dozy kid. I want these boots buffed up for parade this afternoon. I want to be able to see my face in the toe-caps. And you've only got half an hour to do it, so look slippy."

The boy addressed as Thorn took the boots without comment and scuttled off. ("Thorn" was a serviceable approximation of his name. No-one had been able to get his tongue round the double "a" and diphthong when he first arrived.)

He didn't mind cleaning boots. It was a job; a job of definite proportions. You could start it and finish it and contemplate the results with satisfaction. There were jobs which were not like that. His long sensitive fingers touched the letter in his pocket. Instead of the usual three, it had taken five days to arrive. He wondered if the delay was entirely accidental. He had started on

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the second boot when Hepplewhite put his sleek head round the door and said, "Hello, Nuri. I've been looking for you. Flathers wants you."

"Flathers must wait," said Nuri. "I have only got ten minutes to finish these for Gough."

"He said he wanted you at once."

"Gough will not like it if I do not finish these. I am in disfavour already."

It was a delicate problem. The Reverend Dudley Fletcher (or "Flathers") was a housemaster, and capable of being unpleasant if flouted. On the other hand, Gough was head of the house, and a beating from Gough was a thing that had to be avoided at all costs.

"Look here," said Hepplewhite. "Suppose I finish that other boot. You go and see what Flathers wants."

"Do it well," said Nuri. "Gough desires to see his reflection in the toe-cap."

"If I had a face like Gough's," said Hepplewhite, "I wouldn't be so keen to look at it, would you?"

His housemaster was not alone. A second man was seated on the other side of the fireplace. Nuri, who was a quick judge of character, put him down as a senior civil servant or a retired schoolmaster. Both men got up as Nuri came in. His housemaster said, "This is Mr. Behrens. He's connected with the British Foreign Office. He has some news for you."

There was no need for them to say any more. Nuri could read the news in their faces.

He had read it, unmistakably, in the laboured cheerfulness of his father's letter.

Twenty minutes later he faced a wrathful Gough.

"This boot's all right—but this one's a mess. And anyway, who the hell said you could hand the job over to Hepplewhite? I told you to do it yourself."

"I am sorry, Gough," said Nuri seriously. "Had the interruption not been of a vital nature, I should certainly have concluded the task you gave me."

"*What* interruption?"

"I have had news from home. My father died yesterday. I have to return at once."

"I'm sorry," said Gough. He added, being a perfect gentleman, "May I wish your Highness the best of luck?"

"That I may need," said Nuri.

Mr. Behrens said the same thing to him in the car on the way to London Airport. "You realise," he said, "that it's not going to

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be plain sailing. It's unfortunate that you were out of the country when your father died. Everyone thought he was getting over his stroke, and then he had this second one."

"Was it a stroke?"

"Oh, I think so," said Mr. Behrens. He looked at the young man beside him, and wondered what was going on behind that solemn face. "Your father was well liked, and well guarded."

"He had enemies, too."

"Powerful and bitter enemies," agreed Mr. Behrens. Two years before, when the king was on a state visit to London, Mr. Behrens and his old friend and colleague Mr. Calder had both been involved in the security arrangements; arrangements which had culminated in a suitcase bomb exploding prematurely whilst the intended assassin was still carrying it, blowing him to bloodstained rags, killing one bystander and blinding another.

"They would give a good deal," he said, "to delay or spoil your coronation."

The fog rolled up to meet them as they crossed the new bridge at Staines. Mr. Behrens cursed, switched on his fog lamp, and joined the bumping, crawling line of traffic. It took them two hours to reach the airport.

In the V.I.P. departure lounge they found a reception committee assembled. Mr. Absalom, Senior Counsellor from the Embassy, stout and agreeable; Mr. Moustaq, his assistant, thin and silent; and a small, worried man called Forbes, who apparently represented the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Mr. Absalom and Mr. Moustaq kissed Nuri formally, on both cheeks, and Forbes shook his hand, and said, "I'm afraid, your Majesty, that there is no possibility of a flight before tomorrow morning. Gatwick is worse than we are, and conditions at Manchester are almost as bad. We have arranged accommodation at the Airport Hotel——"

As he said this, he looked at Mr. Absalom. Mr. Behrens guessed that there had been a difference of opinion about this.

Mr. Absalom said, showing his teeth in a smile as he did so, "It seemed to us that if there was an entire evening to be passed, it could be passed more pleasantly in London than in the lounge of an Airport hotel——"

Everyone looked at Nuri.

He said, "We will go to London." It was his first pronouncement as Ruler, and deeply though he disapproved of the decision, Mr. Behrens could not help admiring the manner in which it had been promulgated.

He said to Forbes, "I shall have to advise our people about

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this change of plan. Can I use the telephone in your office?" and to the others, "I strongly suggest that we leave our cars here, and use official transport. The drivers here will be much quicker and safer in the fog than we should be. I expect Mr. Forbes can arrange it for us."

Mr. Forbes said he would be glad to do so. The thought of getting rid of the whole party had served to cheer him up considerably.

It was an evening to remember. One of the things about it had been the speed with which Nuri had grown up; a process which normally takes two or three years, compressed into hours.

They had gone, first, to the Embassy, where clothes more suitable than the regulation school uniform had been found. The suit was dark, a little modern in its cut for Mr. Behrens' taste, but inoffensive.

"You will need money," said Mr. Absalom. He produced a wallet. "Some cigarettes—" this was a thin but expensive-looking case of silver, with black filigree work—"and a lighter."

Nuri seemed more pleased with the cigarettes than with the money. He offered them round and lit one himself. "It was the thing I missed most when I went to that school."

"When did you start smoking?" asked Mr. Behrens.

"Not until I was ten," said Nuri. "It is considered wrong in our country for young children to smoke." He exhaled luxuriously, and slipped the cigarette case into the side pocket of his jacket, running his fingers over its smooth surface, and machine-turned corners. "Where shall we eat?"

They ate at the Savoy Grill. Nuri's sophistication did not, Mr. Behrens was glad to see, go as far as drinking alcohol in public, but he made a very good meal. When the last flakes of a second helping of a sticky confection had disappeared he summoned the head waiter with a gesture which brought that dignitary scurrying across the room, and said, "Please congratulate the chef for me. It was an excellent meal," and to Mr. Absalom, "What shall we do next?"

"We have a long and tiring day tomorrow," said Mr. Behrens.

"I had reserved a table at a night club," said Mr. Absalom. "There is a first-class cabaret."

"Splendid," said Nuri. He added, "If you feel tired, Mr. Behrens, there would be no need for you to accompany us."

"I am not in the least tired," said Mr. Behrens, tartly. "I was thinking of your Highness." He was scribbling a note on a piece

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of paper, and as they went out, he handed it to the restaurant manager who accepted it without comment.

The Krokodil was not quite the sort of place that Mr. Behrens had anticipated. The large Embassy car complete with chauffeur and assistant chauffeur, after threading its way with difficulty through Old Compton Street and Frith Street, had finally forced itself into a crowded cul-de-sac, from the dark end of which a green crocodile winked a red eye at them and thrashed its neon tail.

"It is not pretentious," agreed Mr. Absalom. "But they have a good band, and the girls are discreet."

With this last statement Mr. Behrens had so far found no reason to disagree. Angie, Ede, and May had attached themseves to the party as soon as they reached the table. Angie had unbelievably blonde shoulder-length hair, and was now dancing with Nuri. There was not much scope for finesse on the tiny crowded floor, but both danced well, touching, parting, approaching and recoiling in the stylised modern fashion. May, who had red hair, was engaged in a thoughtful flirtation with Mr. Absalom. Ede had given up trying to fathom Mr. Behrens, and was drinking her fourth glass of champagne. She had black hair and a sulky but intelligent face. Mr. Behrens thought that, in a more promising milieu, Ede might have demonstrated quite an attractive personality.

He said, "Where have all the pictures gone?"

Ede stared at him over the rim of her glass, and then giggled, "You've been here before, I can see that. They took 'em down this afternoon for cleaning."

"I noticed the faded patches on the walls. What are they?"

"Photographs. The usual sort of thing. They're a bit rude, actually."

"They must have heard that I was coming," said Mr. Behrens.

Ede looked at him curiously. She thought that he was an odd 'un. She had put him down, at first, as a sugar daddy, but now she was not sure. There was a curious hardness about his eyes and mouth, which contradicted his appearance of grumpy middle-aged benevolence.

"A doctor once told me," said Mr. Behrens, "that too much champagne is bad for the lining of the stomach. Let's have a change." He picked up the wine list, signalled to the waiter, and said, "I should like a glass of this brandy." He indicated the most expensive drink on the list. "And I'm sure this young lady will join me."

"You can only die once," said Ede.

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The waiter said, "I'm sorry, sir, we are out of stock of that brandy."

Mr. Behrens moved his finger up the wine list. "Armagnac, then," he said.

"I *think*," said the waiter, "that we are out of that too. I could find out."

"Don't bother," said Mr. Behrens. He seemed to have lost interest in the topic.

"A little more champagne, sir?"

"Not at the moment." He turned to Mr. Absalom, and said, "I hope that lovely car we came in isn't going to be stolen."

"How should it be?"

"Soho is a dishonest quarter. Or so I have always understood. I don't come here much, in the ordinary way."

"The men will look after it."

"They will find it difficult to do so," said Mr. Behrens. "Unless they have periscopic eyes. They are both of them drinking at that table in the corner."

Mr. Absalom uttered an angry explanation, jumped up, and went over to the table. Mr. Behrens saw him expostulating with the men, one of whom got up and walked out. Mr. Absalom rejoined them.

"It was right of you to point it out to me," he said. "I shall report the men to the head of Chancery. They had no right to come in together. One should certainly have stayed with the car."

"There is very little discipline among young men today," said Mr. Behrens sadly. "If you will excuse me for a moment——"

He got up, and made his way out into the foyer. A thickset man in a dinner jacket was standing there. He wasn't exactly guarding the exit, but he was within easy reach of it.

"I would like to use your telephone," said Mr. Behrens. "An urgent call."

The man considered the matter, running his hand down a chin which looked as if it had already been shaved twice that day, and was about ready for a third scrape. He said, "There's a telephone up there." He pointed to stairs at the end of the passage.

Mr. Behrens thanked him, and walked along the passage, conscious of the man's eyes focussed, like twin gun barrels, on the small of his back. The stairs were carpeted, and led up to a hallway which was on ground-floor level at the back of the building. There were three doors on either side of the passage, but no sign of a telephone.

As Mr. Behrens was hesitating, the middle door on the left hand side of the passage opened and a man came out. He was a

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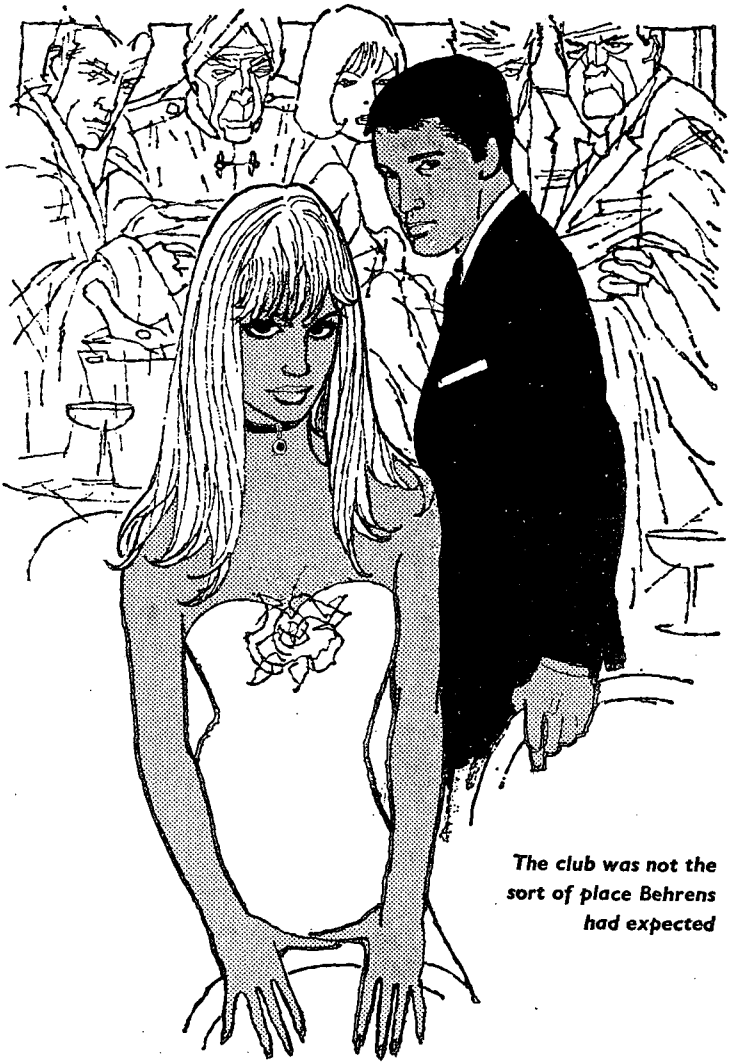

The club was not the sort of place Behrens had expected

big man, bulky but not fat, with skin the colour of *crême caramel* and black hair set in tight, varnished waves. Mr. Behrens said, "The man downstairs—um—told me I would find a telephone up here. I—um—see no telephone. A most important call."

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"You could use the telephone in my office if you wished, sir."

"That's very good of you," said Mr. Behrens. He followed him in. "You would be the manager, I take it? I hardly like to trouble you in the middle of such a busy evening."

"All evenings are busy. That telephone is through to exchange."

"But it's not every night that you have to anticipate a police raid, I imagine," said Mr. Behrens.

"What makes you think we're anticipating a raid, sir?"

"I noticed that you had removed all the—um—exciting pictures from the walls downstairs. And most of the exciting drinks, too. I suppose those are the sort of things that get damaged, or perhaps lost, when you have a lot of heavy-handed policemen about the place."

Mr. Behrens was holding the telephone in one hand as he spoke, and was watching the manager's face. He saw the calculating expression in his eyes, and that was all he did see before the ceiling fell on him and the room rolled slowly over, twice, and dissolved.

Mr. Calder was sitting on a hard chair in an almost unfurnished room next to the superintendent's office in Carver Street police station.

When Mr. Behrens had telephoned him from the airport, he had suggested West End Central police station as a rendezvous. They both knew Chief Superintendent Park, head of the C.I.D. there, and had worked with him on many occasions.

When Mr. Calder reached West End Central, after crawling for three hours through the fog, abandoning his car in a garage at New Cross, and finishing the journey by train, he found a message from the Savoy waiting for him. It said that the party was apparently going on to a night club in Soho, and it suggested that Mr. Calder go to Carver Street, which is the sub-station directly concerned with this area.

When Mr. Calder arrived at Carver Street, he realised that the move had been a mistake. The superintendent in charge had behaved with perfect correctness. He had accepted Mr. Calder's credentials, backed as they were by a message from his own chief, but he had made it quite plain that he regarded the position with disfavour. He did not like any civilians, even official civilians, interfering in police matters. And he did not like his superiors passing such civilians on to him, particularly on a night when he had his hands full. He probably had gastritis and troubles about his allowances as well, thought Mr. Calder. But it didn't make the situation any easier.

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The superintendent explained, as if he grudged every word dispensed, "We've got a big job on tonight. Large scale traffic in hashish. Involves two or three clubs and a lot of boarding-houses. Well—they're brothels, really."

"It sounds exciting," said Mr. Calder. "Which particular clubs and brothels have you got your eye on?"

The superintendent hesitated, and then rapped out a list of names, adding, so quickly that there wasn't even a full stop at the end of the sentence, "I'm afraid I can't ask you to accompany us."

"Of course not," said Mr. Calder. He continued to sit patiently on his chair. The minute hand of the clock crept down towards the half hour after midnight.

"I fear," said Mr. Absalom, "that Mr. Behrens has been called away. We should, I think, be leaving."

"Why slide off now?" said May. "The night's hardly started."

Mr. Absalom looked past her, at the thickset black-jowled man, standing in the doorway. He came forward, smiling. The girls fell silent.

"I think," said Mr. Absalom, "that it is agreed we go. Yes?"

"Oh, sure," said May. "Sure. I'm not objecting." She swallowed half a glass of champagne quickly, as though it had been a prop that the stage manager was going to remove. "Come on, Angie. The party's over."

"Angela will be coming with us," said Mr. Absalom.

The blonde girl had one arm linked through Nuri's. She was smiling nervously. They were all looking at the boy. There was the briefest pause, a tiny hitch, a half beat in the music, a trip in the heart's rhythm.

Then Nuri said, with a smile, "Time for bed, eh?"

"That's right," said Mr. Absalom. "Time we were all in bed."

The party moved as a body to the door, then out into the foyer. The thickset man said, "Pleasant dreams, your Highness."

Mr. Absalom gave him a sharp, unfriendly glance. Then they were in the car. One of the chauffeurs was driving. The other held the door, and climbed into the car with them, occupying the seat previously occupied by Mr. Behrens.

"Where are we going?" said Nuri.

"Actually," said Angie, "you're coming back with me for the night."

Nuri opened his brown eyes a little wider. Then he said, "That's very kind of you. We hardly know each other."

The girl chuckled. "You're a good boy," she said. "I can see

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that. You behave yourself, and we'll have no trouble. Right?"

"Naturally there will be no trouble," said Mr. Absalom. "Our first care must be for his Highness' comfort."

Mr. Behrens rolled over, grunted, and sat up. His fingers scrabbled on the carpet. He opened his eyes fractionally, and closed them again, as an unfriendly hand thrust a white hot skewer through the top of his head. Keeping his eyes shut, he fumbled in his top waistcoat pocket, and brought out a transparent capsule, about the size of a cigarette stub. He snapped it between finger and thumb and held this under his nose.

Five deep breaths later he sat up cautiously, and opened his eyes. The pain had retreated into a dull, throbbing doughnut at the top of his head. His neck felt as though it had been broken and inexpertly set. Otherwise he seemed to be functioning normally. He was in a cell-like room, with two round windows set high up in the wall, and two doors. It looked like the sort of place a man might squeeze a secretary into if the secretary wasn't too fussy about her working conditions. It was furnished with a cheap typing table and one of those curious chairs with spindly legs and no proper back to it.

Mr. Behrens picked up the table. It was a better weapon than a chair. Unfortunately there was no-one to hit with it. He put it down again, and tried the doors. Both, as he had expected, were locked.

Mr. Behrens took out his key fold. Hanging among his car keys and door keys were two steel implements. One looked like a tooth pick with a spatulate tip, the other like a thinner version of the implement with which Scouts are supposed to extract stones from horses' hoofs. Mr. Behrens moved the chair across to the inner door and sat down. It took him three patient minutes to locate the spring in the lock, and another minute to lift and slide the gate. Then he opened the door, and found himself, as he had already guessed he might, back in the office in which he had been knocked out. It was now empty.

Mr. Behrens sat down behind the desk, and tried the drawers. They were none of them locked. In one he found, under some papers, a Walther automatic pistol with a full magazine. He put this in his jacket pocket, walked across to the passage door and opened it.

There was no-one in sight, but there seemed to be quite a lot of people about. There was a hum and clatter from the floor below, and he heard a door open and shut. Mr. Behrens was a man who liked to do things in the simplest and least troublesome

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way. He went back to the office, lifted the receiver from the telephone, and started to dial.

At one o'clock, Mr. Calder had strolled out into the charge room. Here he found the station sergeant, a friendly soul, who produced a cup of tea and a tin of biscuits, which Mr. Calder attacked gratefully, having eaten nothing since lunch time.

"How's the big clean-up going?" he asked.

"It's Operation Wash-out so far," said the sergeant. "We get these tip-offs. Sometimes they're hot. Sometimes just the opposite."

"Nothing at the clubs?"

"We gave the Krokodil the once-over. Clean as a Baptist chapel. We're moving in on the Quart Pot and the Tableau next. We'll do the boarding-houses later. You know what we'll find there? A lot of businessmen, down from Manchester and Liverpool. Virile, these Midland businessmen."

The telephone rang. The sergeant picked it up, listened, and said, "It's for you."

"Take your coat off," said Angie. "Make yourself comfortable. We got a bit of time to put in before anything happens."

"What is going to happen?" enquired Nuri.

"Actually we're waiting here till the police come."

"The police. That will be embarrassing for you, I imagine."

"I'm used to 'em," said Angie. "Besides, confidentially, I'm prepared to put up with a bit of embarrassment, if the money's good enough. It's you who's supposed to be embarrassed."

"Suppose I walk out before they come."

"Well, first, you can't, because I've locked the door, and put the key where you wouldn't find it; and even if you did find it, and unlocked the door, there's someone watching outside, and he'd put you back in again, twice as quick as you went out. So let's relax. We'll have a cup of tea, shall we?"

Nuri looked round the bedroom with interest. It was so neat, and so compact, like a cabin on a ship; the long cupboards with shelves above and below, the bed which folded up into the wall; the tiny curtained annexe, into which Angie had disappeared, and which seemed, from the glimpse he had had of it, to be bathroom, kitchen and scullery combined. It was not unlike his own cubicle at school. Frillier, of course.

"You wouldn't happen," said Angie, "to have such a thing as a cigarette on you? I'm right out of them."

"But of course." Nuri put his hand in his pocket, and then

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stood for a moment, unmoving. There was certainly a case there. He ran his fingers over it, then drew it out, holding it up under the light. There had been ten cigarettes left in the case Mr. Absalom had given him. There were ten in this one. He picked one out and sniffed it delicately.

"I hope you don't mind," he said. "These are Egyptian."

"I'm not fussy," said Angie, re-appearing with a tray on which she had set cups, saucers, milk jug and sugar basin. "Light it for me, there's a dear."

Mr. Behrens had finished telephoning and, being a man who did not believe in wasting opportunities, was examining the contents of the desk drawers, when he heard footsteps in the passage. The door opened, and Mr. Absalom came in. When he saw Mr. Behrens, he started to retreat. When he saw the gun in Mr. Behrens' hands he abandoned the effort, and stood very still.

"Come in," said Mr. Behrens, "and shut the door. Sit down. I'm glad you've come along. It's saved me the trouble of coming to look for you. What have you done with the boy?"

"When you deserted us," said Mr. Absalom, "I still do not understand why—we took him back to the embassy. He is there now. Asleep. I came back here to find out what had happened to you."

"Ingenious," said Mr. Behrens. "But not good enough. The police are planning to raid a number of brothels tonight. The boy has been planted in one of them. You've got thirty seconds to tell me which one it is."

Mr. Absalom's small black eyes shifted from Mr. Behrens' face to the gun in his hand, and then back again.

"If you fire that," he said, "a lot of people will hear it."

"Were you aware," said Mr. Behrens, "that there are twenty-six separate bones in the human foot? The astragalus, the calcaneum, the scaphoid, the cuboid, three different cuneiform bones, five metatarsals and there are no fewer than *fourteen* phalanges."

As he spoke the last word he fired. Mr. Absalom gave a little squeal of surprise. The bullet had carried away the heel of his shoe.

"That was a sighting shot," explained Mr. Behrens.

There were hurried footsteps in the passage. Mr. Behrens got up, picked up a heavy cylindrical ruler from the desk and stood behind the door. It was the coffee-coloured manager who came in. Mr. Behrens hit him, very hard, on the base of the skull, dragged him into the room, locked the door, and turned his

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attention again to Mr. Absalom, who seemed pinned to his chair.

"The last time I shot a man in the foot," he said, "the bullet struck the ento-cuneiform bone—that's the large one on the inside—and broke three of the five metatarsals. He was three months in hospital, and the surgeons then cut off the foot. It was the only way of relieving the agony."

He raised the pistol.

Mr. Absalom's face was grey and his lips were quivering. He said, "I will tell you."

"You'd better not tell any lies," said Mr. Behrens. "I know the addresses, and if you happen to mention one which *isn't* on my list——"

He fired again, and the bullet hit the leg of the chair Mr. Absalom was sitting on.

"Stop, stop," said Mr. Absalom. "I am telling you now. It is a house in Spark Street. At the corner. Number eighteen, I think."

There was a rattling at the door handle, followed by a knocking. Mr. Behrens walked over and opened the door.

Mr. Calder was standing in the passage outside. From below came the sounds of shouting, crashing, and stamping feet.

Mr. Behrens said, "I'm glad you managed to get here. What's happening down there?" As he spoke he was carefully wiping the gun on his handkerchief, and putting it in the desk drawer.

"When I got your telephone call," said Mr. Calder, "I persuaded our friends at Carver Street to organise a *second* raid here. I think it's going to be more fruitful than the first. Have you found out where the boy is?"

"I have," said Mr. Behrens. "The next thing is to get him out without a fuss."

Mr. Absalom seemed to be trying to say something. His mouth was opening and shutting like an expiring frog.

"You will be too late," he said.

Nuri looked at the girl. She was lying back on the bed, her mouth half open, a smile of drowsy contentment on her lips. Her left hand, hanging down beside the bed, held a cigarette.

She must be entirely ignorant of the properties of bhang, he thought, or she would have realised at once, from the taste, what it was she was smoking. It was her third cigarette. The first had made her amorous. The second, fortunately, drowsy. The third was going to put her right out.

As Nuri watched her, her fingers parted, and the half-smoked cigarette fell on to the carpet. Nuri picked it up, and put it on the ash-tray. Then he tiptoed across to the hanging curtains,

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and into the bathroom. Behind him, the girl stirred, and said, "Where are you going?"

"Back in a moment," said Nuri.

He was standing on the end of the bath, working at the catch of the window. It was a very small window, but Nuri was as thin as an eel, and nearly as slippery. He went through feet first and found himself on a sloping roof of slates, which led up to a ridge. This was like a highway, threading among the chimney stacks, and leading the whole length of the block. Halfway along it, Nuri paused.

Something was happening in the street below. He could see the lights of cars, and hear the slamming of doors, followed by knocking and voices shouting. Nuri smiled. For the first time that night he felt happy, by himself, up among the sooty chimneys. The last of the fog had gone and from above his head the stars winked back at him in friendly conspiracy.

He made his way as far as the end house, and found a promising-looking window. It was fastened, but he broke one of the panes of glass with the heel of his shoe, put his hand in and slipped the catch. It was an attic, and empty. He went out into the passage, made his way down three flights of stairs, first bare boards, then linoleum, then carpet; and out into a front hall. He got the front door unlocked and unbolted, and opened it a few inches.

There was a good deal of activity in the street, but most of it seemed to be happening at the far end. He slipped out, pulled the door shut behind him, and ran.

As he turned the first corner, he saw a car parked, with its lights out and two men standing beside it. One he did not recognise. The other was Mr. Behrens.

On the way to the airport, and the early-morning flight which was being held for them, Nuri told Mr. Behrens and the stranger, who turned out to be a Mr. Calder, something of his adventures.

"I can feel things with my fingers," he said, holding out a thin brown hand, "things which I could not see with my eyes. All our family have that facility. I knew, as soon as I touched it, that it was *not* the cigarette case which that fat pig Absalom gave me earlier. He had changed it for another. Probably in the car, when we were sitting squeezed together. It was clear that there would be something wrong with the cigarettes. Bhang, I guessed. What do you call it?"

"Hashish."

"It is against the law to smoke it."

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"It's against the law even to possess it," said Mr. Calder. "If you had been found in that girl's room with a case of reefers in your pocket, you really would have been for it."

"It would not have been sufficient simply that I was in her room? She is a prostitute."

"It wouldn't have been good for your reputation, but it's not illegal."

"Curious," said Nuri, "that the law should punish the lesser sin."

"A lot of our laws are like that," said Mr. Behrens. "Here's the hotel. You've just time for a bath and breakfast."

Three days later, several thousand miles away from the soot of Soho and the fogs of London Airport, Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens were standing on the first floor balcony of the Hotel Continentale. The town had been *en fête* since dawn. The streets were packed with the outlandish crowds that had poured in overnight from the country districts. House and shop-fronts still blazed with electric lights, now paled by the morning sun. Every roof and window showed a flag, or a portrait or a bunch of flowers or paper streamers.

In the distance a band struck up.

"They'll be here soon," said Mr. Calder. And added, "I hope so. I want my breakfast."

"By the way," said Mr. Behrens. "Did they catch that fellow Absalom?"

"No. He and Moustaq both got out by plane that morning. Fortescue thinks they're in Cairo."

"If they know what's good for them," said Mr. Behrens, looking down at the crowd below, "they'll stay in Cairo. I hope they've made trouble for that club."

His head was still sore.

"The second raid was a great success. They found a lot of undutied liquor and a very interesting collection of blue films. Here they come."

A burst of cheering heralded the head of the procession. First came a company of Boy Scouts, older than their English counterparts, some of them sporting quite impressive black moustaches, but all bare-kneed and serious. Behind them, the Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance. Then the massed bands. The Municipalities. The Fire Brigade. The Heroes of the Revolution, and the Foreign Diplomats. Mr. Behrens was glad to see that the procession had been organised to play down the military side. It was essentially a civilian jamboree. After the diplomats came

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several more bands, all playing vigorously, and all playing different tunes, followed by senior members of the government, and every male relative of the Royal House, each in a more gorgeous motor car than the last.

Then came the mounted troopers of the police, ceremonial lances at the carry, carbines slung from their shoulders.

Then, as the seventh wave of seven gathers itself together, checks for a moment, and crashes down on the shingle, came the roar of the crowd as the open, pale-blue and silver Rolls Royce turned the corner.

In the back, upright, serious and straight as a blade, sat Nuri.

"Upon the King," Mr. Behrens quoted softly, to himself. "Let us our lives, our souls, our debts, our careful wives, our children and our sins lay on the King."

In the last four days Mr. Behrens had grown very fond of Nuri. The boy had shown himself brave and resourceful. He knew what he wanted to do and would, if given time, learn how to do it. If he could escape the sudden bullet, and the planted bomb. If he could answer propaganda with deeds. He had captured their hearts. Now he would have to capture their minds.

Mr. Behrens thought there was a chance, an outside chance, that he might do it.

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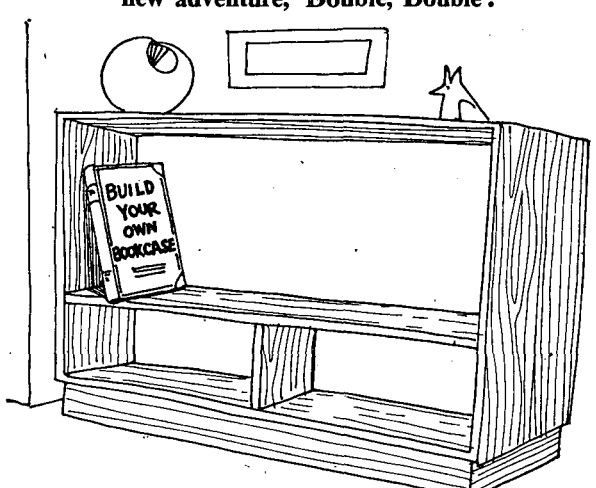
Next month: The Calder dossier, and another new adventure, 'Double, Double'.



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Two very different writers, in two very different stories, take moving and amusing trips back in time to a world seen through the eyes of boyhood . . .

A Glimpse of the Past 1

SEEDING TWENTIES

BY GWYN THOMAS

SMEDLEY gave the smallest pennyworth in the history of the potato, and if you complained he would tell you to read up what had happened to Ireland in the eighteen-forties and to thank your lucky stars.

My father and his friends, on the grass patch by the old steam fan, often spoke of Smedley and his sombre approach to the chip trade.

"It is clear," said my father, "that he is nursing some grudge big enough to break both his arms."

One night my father and Waldo Treharne had a chat with Smedley during a lull in the frying. They said that they wished to give him formal welcome to Meadow Prospect, but added that they were convinced that such brooding secretiveness as his was bound to affect the quality of his materials, even the fish. "Don't forget, Mr. Smedley, if you have a trouble, confide in us. Don't be a man on your own. If you've fled into the chip traffic to escape a broken heart as other voters flee into the Legion, you'll find Meadow Prospect the sort of place that can slap your gonads back into life and keep them singing. Not a licentious place, mark you, but working always to a steady beat."

That same night Naboth Kinsey was asked to take his gramophone and records and play them on the small vacant lot behind Smedley's shop. Naboth functioned as a kind of mechanical Orpheus in that part of Meadow Prospect, and in any part of the town where my father and his friends felt a need to give comfort to the sick, the old, the lonely and disabled, Naboth would carry his great horned gramophone. We would follow close behind him with the records and the low table on which the

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gramophone would rest during the recital. Behind us came my father pondering the nature of the audience we were likely to have and arranging the programme.

About thirty yards from Smedley's shop was a row of tiny houses. It was called simply The Slope, and in one's mental vision it was always heading sharply uphill as if trying to get away. In these places lived a high proportion of people who seemed to have withdrawn utterly from the life of Meadow Prospect. A crust of neglect had formed over people and dwellings, and one could not speak of them without feeling that men, women and tottering stones were heading for some quiet and sinister fusion. In the third house of The Slope lived a young widow of striking loveliness and blackly inconsolable. It was to this place, these people, that Naboth Kinsey now turned the horn of his gramophone.

Naboth was given his head in choosing the programme. He brought out his incomparable collection of Caruso records. Early spring was stirring among the hills, and every shout of rebirth and loving reassertion found an echo in the great brazen beauty of Enrico. I was in Smedley's shop when he first heard *Celeste Aida*. His head shot up from its sad business over the pans and his hand with it, sending a spray of hot fat around the shop that caused some of the clients to think that Smedley's misanthropy had now entered a new and actionable phase. They told him to take it easy unless perhaps he wanted them around the counter, mixing it.

Then they saw the radiant emotion on his face, brilliant behind the very heavy texture of his black moustache. For minutes Smedley stood over the range, transfixed, translated to a plane as far above chips as a plane can get. We reported this reaction to my father and Naboth, and they laid in a stock of gramophone needles big enough to bore through the walls of any Troy of rejection that Smedley might have built up in his heart.

The young widow in the third house of The Slope came out, sat on her step, smiled quietly at the great triumphant flight of Enrico's voice, sniffed the sunlight as if tasting a new fruit and began to peel the layers of inward darkness that death had left inside her to be called for later. That evening she came down to Smedley's for the first time, was greeted by him with a passionate stare and a monumental twopennyworth salted personally by Smedley.

It was the *Niun mi tema* death cry of Otello that caused the highest rapture in Smedley. When he first heard this, and Naboth had had the gramophone brought up to the back window of the

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shop so that he would lose nothing of the flavour, he dropped a bag of chips to the floor and turned fourteen clients out of the shop, and cried a little as he stood over the bubbling pan. Our Assistant Sanitary Inspector, Simon Wimpey, said that this was a clear breach of the Pure Food Regulations and told Smedley either to toughen his fibres or cry away from the chips, if he wished to avoid prosecution.

It was on a Friday night, after Naboth had put on a whole flight of superb tenor laments by Caruso, that Randolph Shand walked into the shop.

"He's dead," said Randolph.

"Who's dead?" asked my father.

"Him. The singer, the lovely singer, Caruso, with Naboth out there, coming from the horn. He died in America. Hit the loudest note of his life, they say, and the breath never came back."

Smedley's jaw dropped almost into the chip fat, and a silence fell upon us that stayed hard for weeks.

It was about two months later that my father walked into the kitchen with a roll of sheet music. "Learn this," he said and picked the notes out on an ancient zither while I went through the words.

Within the hour we were on our way to Smedley's.

Smedley had been having trouble with his fires and the shop was full of hungry, muttering customers. My father pulled into position the lemonade box that served as a platform for the odd singer or reciter who might volunteer to help pass the time during a lull in the chip trade.

My father called for silence. When he got it, he said, very significantly, "Now first we'll have that song about Caruso from my youngest boy, who is a peerless boy alto."

"Who?" asked Smedley.

"My son, the boy Chaliapine."

"No. No. Who is the song about, did you say?"

"Caruso, the peerless Enrico Caruso."

Smedley's hands left the chipper and he moved towards my father.

"Oh aye, of course. He's dead, isn't he?"

"The song my son is going to sing is a small obituary ballad written to lament the passing of the great tenor. Now then, up on this box with you, boy."

I was helped up on to the box that had once contained lemonade bottles. I liked singing on this box. It gave me a sense of authority to be clearly above the heads of my audience, and the

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empty box gave my voice an extra edge of resonance. I began to sing:

They needed a song-bird in heaven,
To sing while the angels did play.
God told the angels where one could be found,
So they came and they took him away.
He's gone to the sweet land of sunshine
For ever and ever to stay.
They needed a song-bird in heaven,
So they took poor Caruso away.

I ended on a note that made four people duck and the metal that covered the counter rattle. Smedley's face was humble and distraught. "Please sing that again."

We watched Smedley. The words or the sound of my voice had started some gusher of uproarious feeling in him. He had abandoned all his work at the chipper and the pans and was staring through the shop window, uncurtained for greater economy, at the full moon that had just cleared the top of the west mountain.

Smedley scooped the chips and fish into the central compartment of the range. He began to serve. When we offered money he said, "Take them, take them. Tonight I want no money. Please!"

The word slipped forth and a queue formed outside the shop.

"And keep singing," my father told me. "Keep singing loud."

"Could I switch to *Roses of Picardy*?" I asked between verses. "I won a prize with *Roses of Picardy*."

"Forget roses. Forget Picardy. Keep singing that song about Caruso." And he turned to me and said I was to keep singing that number even if it meant supplying me with air from the back as one did with the more rudimentary chapel organs.

"That boy is hitting some nerve in Smedley with that song. I'm glad of that. Can you imagine those angels just ordering Caruso from God like a meal? We want a song-bird, they say, and off goes this poor Italian. No tenor is safe."

Then when Smedley could give no more away, he went into the kitchen behind the shop and removed his shop coat. He took off the black tie, which he wore as part of the fundamental act of mourning his life had become, and put on a smart bow-tie. It was a floppy red article of a sort not seen before in Meadow except on the screen of Luther Cann's cinema, the Coliseum, being worn by such voters as painters off on some errand of seduction. It gave Smedley a sharply confidential and sinful look, and we awarded him, as we crowded around him, full

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marks for elegance and daring. It was something the zone had been starved of for years, and we had never thought to see it around the neck of Smedley. We felt the whole evening take on an extra pair of wings.

Smedley left the shop. He made no effort to turn us out or to turn down the lights. This was in clear contrast with his normal practice. Usually at the end of the day's trading he would be heard for minutes on end rattling the bolts of his locked door to prove their firmness, and leaving the shop as utterly lightless and sealed as an expensive tomb. He had left the pair of cutlets and a modest pile of chips in the central compartment of the range. At that moment of ecstatic repletion none of us would have dreamed of laying a finger on them.

Smedley made his way up The Slope towards the widow's house. I, following at about ten yards, was still singing but with an excessive throatiness now and flagging plainly. My classmate, Enzo Fosco, the son of the Italian caterer, Pietro Fosco, and a boy who wore his extraordinary perception of things as easily as an old coat, came quickly up to me and said that my father's intention was to have me wind up carrying my larynx in a sling.

We all stopped outside the widow's house. Smedley spoke no word of objection to our following behind him like a long excited tail. He went at a confident trot to the widow's door. He rapped on it. The night was quite silent. The three raps on the knocker were the only marks on it. The sense of high drama we all felt was around us, tangible as an iron hoop. A dim light came up through the fanlight above the widow's door. The glass was thick with dust and seemed consciously to be fighting to put transparency in its flippant place. From behind the door there was a strange rustle as of someone rising from a bed of old newspapers. The door opened. Smedley asked for the widow's hand. He used a formula as precise as his moustache, as glaring as the light in his eye. The widow gave a short sob of acknowledgment and said, "Yes."

We all raised a small cheer and Smedley led the widow down the hill, adjusting the red bow tie which some convulsion of excitement had loosened. We reached the shop and my father hurried to get to the head of the procession.

Smedley and the widow sat down at the table in the chip shop. They were not allowed to lift a finger at their betrothal feast. We put the cutlets and chips left by Smedley on plates, and salted and vinegared them to a point that seemed to please Smedley but startled the widow, who had never before been waited on by so intrusive and eager a corps of helpers, and who had clearly never

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before seen her chips afloat so soon after their appearance on the plate. We formed a half-circle around the couple and sang them the *Hunters' Chorus* from *Der Freischütz* which we had just learned at school, and which seemed to have just the note of bounding brightness to set Smedley right for the night.

As we left them, Smedley and the widow were exchanging the whole curriculum of glances, grimaces and smiles associated with the urge to be as one. As we walked up the road my father said he was going to call in at Naboth Kinsey's to canonise his gramophone. The moon stood in full and massive censure above our scurrying.

Smedley and the widow were married a week later. They spent their honeymoon at a spa whose waters were very acrid and favoured by Smedley. He returned with the expression of having been laved in a fundamental and not altogether pleasant way. His behaviour in the shop slipped back on its old granitic base. Caruso himself, giving out with everything he had and helped out by Zenatello, could not have shifted him. He expanded his business. He gave even smaller helpings, put the price of his cutlets up by a halfpenny and reduced their size to a point where he seemed to be wishing to hide the identity of the original fish. And he seemed to find joy in working his wife to death.

One night my father hoisted me once more on to the lemonade box and told me to let rip with the Caruso ballad, while he and his companions hummed a descant. Smedley listened to us for a minute, putting a finger in the ear he had nearest to the bubbling chip fat to give us fuller attention. My father watched him attentively, convinced by Smedley's raptness that another moonburst was on its way to Smedley. But all he did was to shout at his wife to hurry with the next bucket of potatoes, and to tell us that, if we and our ambitions as a glee group were not out of his shop in thirty seconds, he would send for Police Constable Ophie Pinfold, by local standards a mailed fist, and have us charged with creating confusion and migraine in the chip trade.

Smedley's wife came in from the kitchen with a bucket loaded to the brim. He reproved her with clicking teeth and a frozen eye when one potato slid to the floor. She came over to the chipping machine near which my father was standing.

"You and your something Caruso," she said softly. "You and your something moonlight!" A tidy tongue, the widow's, always this side of the uncouth. Then she brought down the blade of the chipper with a homicidal violence and resolve which never again allowed my father to look at or think of chips in the same old tender light.

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A Glimpse of the Past 2

DANDY

BY ALAN EVANS

THE knocker-up was still going round when we went down to the shore. We were gathering sea coal, picking it from the sand where it lay in long black shadows at the limit of the high tide. We filled the sack and dragged it to the barrow and then found we could not lift it on.

Maggie was angry, her lips pulled in and her brows drawn down. She looked cold, her face bluey-white and the end of her nose red. The wind roared in off the sea and I didn't feel any warmer, although I wore Dad's old coat that Maggie had cut down for me. It still came to my ankles and the other lads had some sport out of that, but I was glad of it that morning.

Maggie fumbled with the cord at the neck of the sack.

"We'll have to take some out."

I turned my back to the wind, and saw him. A big man, wearing a fisherman's jersey and heavy trousers, but light canvas shoes on his feet. He was trotting just clear of the breaking waves, where the sand was firm and smooth, his hands held high on his chest, seeming to spring along, barely marking the sand.

"Here's a lad can help us," I shouted. "Hey, mister! Will ye give us a hand?"

He trotted up to us, and kept on jigging up and down on his toes, short, dancing steps. He had broad shoulders on him and a square, red face with eyes the colour of the sea, now blue, now green with little specks of light in them. I could see he was no lad, being thirty or more, but still he looked younger without any beard or 'tache.

He said, "What're ye doing? Gettin' sea coal?"

"Aye. And the bag's ower full for us to lift."

He looked down at the sack then up at Maggie, trying to hold the hair from her face as the wind whipped it in streamers, and

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at the same time control her skirts that swirled and lifted to show her ankles in her old boots.

He grinned. "You look cold, lass."

"I am," Maggie said tartly. "And I want to get home."

"So you will." He stopped his jigging, bent and picked up the sack and put it, not dropped it, in the barrow. And the weight of it whipped up the shafts and they caught Maggie smack on the behind.

She yelped, jumped and clapped her hand behind her. I burst out laughing, but got out of her way, quick. I knew Maggie, and for a second I thought the big lad was going to catch it. He thought so, too, and put up his fists, but that comical I had to laugh again.

Maggie didn't laugh. She said, "You're a fighting man?"

He lowered his hands, looked at them, then at Maggie. He said seriously, "No. I am not."

Maggie sniffed. "That's good. We've one too many round here as it is."

And I knew who she meant.

I took the shafts and started pulling the barrow back to the village, Maggie giving a shove over the soft bits.

Maggie said, "I haven't seen you down here before." At that time of a morning we'd never seen anybody down there. But he took the point.

"I'm in the grocery business."

"Are you the one that's took Ted Cummings' shop?"

Of course he was. There was only one shop. He didn't look like a grocer to me. Old Ted was a grocer and he was a little man dried up like his prunes. But if this lad was a grocer he had to be a good 'un to buy out Ted, because Ted had a good business and two dried-up little men working for him.

They talked back and forth, careful-polite, and I saved my breath for pushing the barrow. But I liked him straight off. He had a pleasant, easy way about him.

We came up to the village, the black spinning spider of the pit wheel hanging over the houses. There he left us; and just as well, because we met Blacky Morris right after. He was out early, probably on his way to the Collingwood for a rum and coffee to stiffen him after the night before.

Blacky did not work. He was the fighter, a professional, the biggest and the best around that part of the world and he knew it. When the men talked about him they said he was a nasty bastard and everybody knew that. And he fancied Maggie because she wouldn't have him and everybody knew that, too.

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He planted himself in front of the barrow and just leered at her.

"Ye won't be seeing me for a bit."

Maggie said, "Good."

He just grinned wider. "I'm away to London. To fight."

"I hope you get your thick heid knocked off."

"There's niver a man could do it. So dinna worry; I'll be back."

He sidled around the barrow and Maggie slid away from him. "I'll shout for the pollis if you touch me."

He stopped. "Niver mind. One o' these days."

"Not any day."

Blacky laughed. "It'll be me or nobody. Just remember, I'll be back."

And he clouted my head for luck and swaggered away to the pub. He would only be welcome there for what he spent.

Maggie was full, but she didn't say anything, just pushed the barrow while I held my stinging ear. One time or another I got plenty of that, and earned it, but coming from Blacky it was different.

The house was a pit cottage and Dad kept it because he still had a job on top of the ground, when he was fit. We got coal as well, but the sea coal came in handy. You couldn't have too much coal in the winter and we kept a roaring fire going.

Two days later I got back from school and found Dad at the door talking to the big lad we had met on the shore. It was a working day, but he was dressed to the nines with a good suit, polished boots and a billy-cock hat tipped on the side of his head.

He had a pony and trap with him, a real smart turn-out, and he was saying, "Ted Cummings said you knew about horses and you might have a look at her, and tell me if I've bought a good 'un."

That was true enough; the old feller had worked a lot with the ponies when he was underground. And it was true of a lot of others that were closer to Ted's shop.

Anyway, the old feller walked round this one, feeling its legs, looking at its mouth, me feeling and looking with him.

He said, "She's all right."

Then Maggie came out and Dad said, "This is Andy Jackson."

I said, "I reckon it should be Dandy Jackson." And Dad might have belted me then but this big lad just laughed and they all got talking.

Finally he said, "Will you come for a spin down the coast?"

So Maggie said "No" and Dad said "No" and they waited a

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decent minute while he talked them round and we all got in and away we went.

From then on it was all Dandy. He talked old Ted into coming back to look after the shop on Saturdays. It didn't take much talking. Ted was glad to get out of the house for one day and his old wife said he was a lost soul in it. So Dandy went to Newcastle to the football and took Dad with him. And me. The next week he took Maggie as well and she walked round the shops all afternoon.

In between he was in and out of the house till it was like he lived there; and he was welcome. He was always well turned-out, even in the shop, and everybody took to calling him Dandy, but they all liked him. I'd never liked anybody better, except Dad.

Mostly I played out with the lads, but I went out a lot with the old feller when his chest wasn't bad, down to the shore or back in the fields, talking about all sorts. We spent a lot of time like that. A grand man.

Once I asked him, "What about Dandy and Maggie?"

He smiled. "It's their business."

"I meant Blacky Morris."

He said, "I think Dandy knows about Blacky." But he didn't sound happy about that.

Another time I put it to Maggie, "What about Blacky Morris?"

She shrugged. I said, "There'll be trouble."

"No. There won't."

"You can't stop it."

"I can and I will."

"How?"

But she wouldn't say.

The days slipped by and school broke up. Dandy let me help in the shop, and run errands, and I had a few coppers in my pocket. At night we would sit round the fire talking and at weekends we'd be away in Dandy's trap, the pony high-stepping, Dandy cracking the whip and Maggie proud as punch beside him. They were great times, and nobody with a worry but me.

Then one afternoon I was in the shop, sitting tucked in among the sacks of spuds reading Dandy's paper, him busy at the counter and the talk going on, a pleasant unheeded murmur. Suddenly it stopped.

Blacky Morris stood at the counter, still in his ulster, straight off the train, but already he'd heard. There would be someone at the Collingwood to tell him before he got his first pint down him.

He eyed Dandy, seeing a man as big as himself, but measuring

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him in other ways, too. He leaned his hands on the counter, head thrust forward, and said, "So you're the one. Bloody counter-jumper."

Dandy didn't say anything, but the half-dozen wives in the shop got out quick, and waited outside the door to see what would happen. Blacky looked at Dandy, who wore his clean white shirt, necktie and good trousers, although he was working. Blacky reached out and began poking him in the chest with one finger.

"I wondered if there was anything behind that shirt."

Dandy stood still and quiet.

Blacky said, "You've had your time. Now I'm back. So keep away from her. You hear?"

Dandy said, "There's a law—"

Blacky laughed, sure now. "Dam' all good it'd do ye when I'd finished wi' ye. It's crutches ye'd want, not the law." He poked Dandy again. "So keep away. Hear?"

Dandy was silent a moment, then thickly, "I hear you."

Blacky stepped back, looked Dandy over again, then went out, laughing all the way. And Dandy stood there. I went straight home. Dandy came around later that night. I couldn't look at him.

He said, "You heard?"

Maggie nodded. "You did right. But you'd better keep away till he's gone."

"Gone?"

Maggie smiled. "He's got another fight in London. His manager's arranging it and when he's ready he'll come up for Blacky."

"How do you know?"

I muttered, "Everybody knows. Just like everybody knows about him and you."

Maggie snapped, "It's none of your business. And Dandy did right."

Dandy was watching me and looking as sick as I felt. He said, "It's no answer."

"It's my answer."

Dad said, "Maggie's right. He's a professional and you'd not have a chance with him. There'd be no sense in you fighting him."

He didn't sound too sure, but Maggie was, jumping in quick and hauling Dandy out of his chair. "Get away home. And keep away till he's gone." Then, looking up at him, "I told you I didn't want that sort of man."

Dandy rubbed one hand over his face, glanced at me again,

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and away. He said wearily, "I'm not that sort of man. You know that." He sighed. "Anyway, we'll try it your way."

So he stayed away from the house, but Blacky did not stay away from him. Blacky hung around the shop, grinning and passing remarks. If he met Dandy in the street he'd stand in the way so Dandy had to walk around him. When Dandy walked by the Collingwood Blacky would be at the door, jeering; and when it shut Blacky would stop outside the shop on his way home to bellow up at the windows, "G'neet bonny lad!"

I stopped working at the shop, stopped seeing Dandy, but I watched him from a distance and he took it all and kept his face straight but his eyes down.

He didn't like it. Nor did anybody else. And they started to dislike Dandy because he made them feel ashamed, as he made me feel ashamed.

It went on for ten days. Then on a Friday night, late, Dandy turned up at the house. He sat down in the big chair by the fire, quiet and relaxed, but he said, "I'll be round early in the morning with the trap. Very early, before he's out of bed. And we'll go to Newcastle."

Maggie started to say, "It's not worth it. He'll be gone—"

But Dandy cut her off. "I just want to get away for a few hours. We'll go early and come back late. He'll never know. But I want to go. I couldn't stand another day."

And Maggie looked at him and nodded. She said, "We'll go. It's been bad for you, I know that. But I'm proud."

Dandy glanced at me. He said dryly, "You're the only one."

"He's just a bairn."

"Your father's not a bairn."

"He doesn't know."

I said, "Know what?"

Dandy smiled faintly at Maggie. He said, "The young 'uns always want to know everything. They don't know how lucky they are."

Maggie reached out to rub my hair. She said softly, "That's a fact." And to Dandy, "He's a good lad."

It did not make sense. But the next morning we were up and about in the dark and off in the trap when the men were still on the way to work. It was a fine day, cold but sunny. Ships in the Tyne, a fair on the Town Moor, football, a music hall at night.

Maggie was laughing the whole day, Dandy roaring his head off, having a great time, and Dad joining in though he looked a bit thoughtful now and then. And at last I forgot about Blacky, and once or twice at the football and the fair it was just like old

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times with Dandy. It was a fine day, and I fell asleep in the trap on the way home, a blanket round me.

I woke terrified by the shouting, the leaping lights, the clatter and scream of the pony. I yelled but nobody heard me, and Maggie was holding me tight and I strained away to see. We were outside the Collingwood, the light streaming from the windows and Blacky Morris stood wide-legged, holding the pony's head, and there was a crowd all round us.

Blacky was shouting, "I told ye to keep away from her and ye sneak away like the bloody rat ye are! Are ye going to get down?"

The crowd went quiet. Dandy shook his head.

"What if I haul you out o' there?"

Dandy said nothing, just sat straight and handsome in his fine suit, the billy-cock hat tipped on the side of his head.

And Blacky said, "Look at him!" He laughed and spat, then squinted up at Dandy. He said more quietly, "Ye're lucky. Because my manager's back. He's in the pub now and we go to London tomorrow; so I can't afford trouble now. But as soon as I can I'll be back, and then God help ye."

And still Dandy sat there, silent. It seemed to infuriate Blacky. He shouted, "But why should I worry? Lass'll be safe enough. It's not like I was leaving her wi' a man that could land her with a bastard!"

My father started to get up out of the trap and he was quick but Dandy was quicker with a hand on his chest, thrusting him back. Dandy looked at Maggie and said, "I tried."

She nodded dumbly and Dandy hitched the reins round the whip and stepped out of the trap; the crowd scattering, Blacky loosing the pony and coming to meet him, grinning now, hungry. For a second I thought Dandy still wasn't going to fight. He kept on his jacket and his hat, but then he put up his hands and I saw Blacky's grin fade and a curious look come into his face.

The crowd closed in again, black-mouthed in the yellow gaslight, shouting, and I saw one man run out of the pub and try to get through, but their backs were a wall against him.

Then they were at it. I saw all of it, high in the trap above the crowd, Maggie's arm clamped around me; and this was what I'd wanted and now I was terrified for Dandy.

He seemed to have no heart for it, moving slowly, his left arm stuck out and his right fist cocked against his chest. Blacky crowded in on him and Dandy slid away, Blacky all over him, but that long left arm started jabbing away and Blacky didn't seem able to get past it. He worked Dandy into a corner, the

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crowd giving back for them, but then Dandy was out of it and Blacky chasing him again, round and around and that left hand poking into Blacky's face all the time.

Blacky stopped, panting, wiping at his face, peering at Dandy, not angry any more, just that curious look on his face as if he could not believe what he saw.

Dandy moved in on him and I watched Dandy and he showed no anger, either, his face serious and intent as a man absorbed in his work. And that left fist was now bang-bang-banging away at Blacky, Dandy walking around him and Blacky trying desperately to hit him, to stop him. And now Dandy frightened me.

It went on and on and the crowd were quiet as the grave and all I could hear was the sickening chop of that fist on Blacky's battered head, and now I saw it.

The voice rode thin and high, breaking, "No, Dandy, please! No more."

It was my own.

And Dandy stopped. Blacky wavered on his legs, blinking stupidly, pawing automatically at the air in front of him. Dandy stepped in and hit him once, quickly, as if eager to finish now, and Blacky fell.

There was no cheering. They looked at Blacky sprawled on the cobbles, and then at Dandy, tall and straight, the billy-cock hat still tip-tilted on his head, and they drifted away.

Except one man. He was thin, sharp-faced, and he had tried to break through the crowd when the fight started. Now he walked up to shake his head over Blacky.

He said, "I'm his manager. Or was. I tried to stop him. I knew you, even without the 'tache." He glanced down again at Blacky, then shrugged. "Well, got to start all over again." He cocked an eye at Dandy. "I don't suppose you've changed your mind—" He stopped and shook his head. "No. You were always the wise one. But in a way it was a pleasure to see you at it again."

He touched his hat, then turned away and got hold of a couple of gawpers to help him lift Blacky into the pub.

Dandy climbed into the trap and Maggie was beside him. I found myself sitting with Dad.

Dandy looked at me and said, "I'm sorry about him."

Maggie said, "It's all right now."

And it was, though I was still afraid in spite of the time for fear being past. It was all right now and I put my hand in Dandy's and held it tight, just like a little bairn, but I needed it and wanted it. We were going to have some grand times.

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Pot Luck

DEEP-FREEZE BLUES

It may be very easy,
Using packets rather freezy,
And it's quick to take our supper off the ice.
While the haute cuisine is thawing,
There's no time to find it boring,
And the end result is often very nice.
But my dear—how long does the memory linger
Of your instant pea and your frozen fish finger?

PAUL HESPE

snails

I was once present at a learned discussion between two stubborn gentlemen who were arguing as to the respective merits of the snails of Bourgogne and those of Provence. They were not speaking of the manner of preparing the snails, but of their natural flavour. One declared that the Bourguignons were more delicate, since they fed on vine-leaves, and the other that those of Provence were more delicious, owing to their diet of thyme and fennel.

All that is simply absurd. Whatever the snail's food may be, it is improbable, to say the least of it, that any flavour is left after the animal has been starved for thirty or forty days, cleaned in vinegar and salt, rinsed in ten lots of water, and then boiled for several hours.

ALIN LAUBREAUX. *The Happy Glutton*

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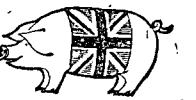
Food, Glorious Food!



Food is not a thing to treat with flippancy. Like all events which gratify the senses, it should be appreciated anxiously though calmly, and with what Mr. John Drinkwater would call "a fine thoughtfulness". Above all, patriotism is not enough. It is indeed very foolish, if one is English, or even American, to be unduly patriotic about one's food. We have our virtues. The English have their bacon and their beef. The Americans have their salads and those crisp but flabby things one eats with treacle. It would be mere jingoism to contend that the halibut of the English dining-car is anything more than a dead and sodden fish. One would have to be 102 per cent American to defend those sickly and gaseous beverages with which, so I am told, the most powerful nation of the twentieth century destroys its teeth and its digestion.

HAROLD NICOLSON. *Small Talk*

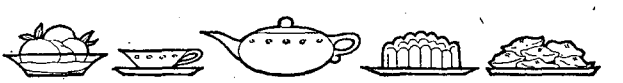
Heaven sends us good meat, but the devil sends us cooks.

DAVID GARRICK

AFTERS ONLY

Though we eat little flesh and drink no wine,
Yet let's be merry; we'll have tea and toast;
Custards for supper, and an endless host
Of syllabubs and jellies and mince-pies,
And other such ladylike luxuries.

SHELLEY. *Letter to Maria Gisborne*



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SOLID DIET

When a dinner has been prepared by a chef who prides himself on being a decorative artist, the guest of honour, and whoever else may be the first to be served, have quite a problem to know which part of an intricate structure is to be eaten and what part is scenic effect.

The main portion is generally clear enough; the uncertainty is in whether the flowers are edible vegetables and whether the things that look like ducks are potatoes or trimming . . . Rings around food are nearly always to be eaten; platforms under food seldom, if ever, are. Anything that looks like pastry is to be eaten . . . but if, in taking what looks like something eatable, you do help yourself to part of the decoration, no great harm is done.

EMILY POST. *Etiquette*, 1922

Thou should'st eat to live; not live to eat.

CICERO

A TOAST

Drink deep to Uncle Uglug,
That early heroic human,
The first to eat an oyster,
The first to marry a woman.

God's curse on him who murmurs
As the banquet waxes moister,
"Had only he eaten the woman,
Had only he married the oyster!"

OGDEN NASH. *Versus*

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PETER USTINOV

The Loneliness of Billiwoonga

For some, reality had been too ferocious ever to ignore

EUROPE occupies the same position in many European hearts as does a school, loved and hated at the same time. Its habits are irreplaceable, its secret, intimate pleasures cannot be recreated in wider pastures, and yet its stern rules seem to be built on firm foundations of bigotry, its actions obedient to an ancient stupidity.

Every twenty years or so, at the blow of a bugle as casual as the chiming of a clock, it is *de rigueur* for the healthy men to go to the railway station and leave for the frontier amid a forest of sad white handkerchiefs and the blare of martial music from the crackling speakers. What frontier? Any frontier, for they shift like the tides; politicians call them historical, generals call them strategic, simple men call them a confounded nuisance.

Jiři Polovička was sick of it. He had been sick of it in 1939, he was sicker of it now. Born in 1904, of a Czech father and a Slovak mother, he had found himself a Hungarian citizen after the end of World War I, for no other reason than that his father had settled on the wrong side of a river. Eventually old Mr. Polovička decided to move to his mother country, since minorities have their problems in Central Europe. Desiring to travel as far away from Hungary as the somewhat freakish geography

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of Czechoslovakia would allow, he opened a small grocer's shop in Teschen, a mining town on the Polish frontier.

Life was relatively calm until the anxieties of the late thirties, when overnight the whole Polovička family became Polish. Since their entire capital was invested in the disputed town, it was economically impossible for them to emigrate again. Whatever patriots may say when unveiling statues, the threat of starvation is a more powerful argument than abstract sentiments of belonging. Before long, Hitler had made a nonsense of all the finer feelings in any case, and Jiří had not been in the Polish army for two days before he found himself a prisoner of war among people whose language he understood with difficulty, undergoing gratuitous hardships to the taste of the master race.

A spell of digging potatoes for a kindly Silesian farmer was interrupted with an offer to join a Bohemian-Moravian brigade, which was destined to fill the gaps on the eastern front when the time came. When this offer was refused with great politeness, the German government took it as a personal affront, and Jiří was sent on a visit to Ravensbruck, which was interrupted only after six months, when he was transferred to Auschwitz. The Gestapo made it clear that they considered his masquerade as a Pole a deliberate attempt to deceive them, declaring that as a Czech he was now protected by the Reich and that his engagement in a foreign army had been nothing less than treason.

Luckily for him, they took several years to decide the exact extent of this treason, and so he survived, moving from one camp to another. It was the Russians who eventually liberated him, and he spent some more time in a camp, answering endless questions to the best of his exhausted ability. They found it difficult to decide whether he was a Pole, a Hungarian, or a Czech, and seemed to be sceptical about everything he told them. Eventually they relented, and he returned to a grey, unsettled Czechoslovakia late in 1946.

His father had disappeared without trace; so had his mother. The shop was no longer there. He was forty-two years of age and felt like an orphan, drained of emotion, hard, empty, without the energy for suicide. Self-pity would have been risible under the circumstances. The hibernation had been too long, the wound too deep, too clean. He wanted to walk, to use his legs, to breathe again consciously—in, out, in, out.

For a time he worked as night watchman of a sausage factory. He was used to solitude; in fact he felt lost without it. He was not used to freedom, however, and he boiled himself some atrocious coffee every night, and every night it seemed to him a kind

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of miracle that such a thing was possible: to desire coffee, and to make it. These were the nights of the slow thaw. Gradually he dared to think. In time, he even dared to doubt. It was like the slow, painful recovery from some accident, an accident of the spirit.

One day, when he was ready, he took stock. He believed he had a distant cousin in America. America—the *New World Symphony*. Dvořák—where Czechs could be Czechs under the Constitution. On second thought, he didn't care whether he was a Czech or not. He just wanted to exist, and perhaps even find a reason for not being a pessimist. He longed for a place totally without traditions, for escape from the hothouse of Central Europe.

A casual remark overheard at work gave him the idea of Australia. There was a map on the wall of the managing director's office, peppered with little flags showing the areas in which the sausages were selling well.

Bulgaria seemed to be consuming nothing but sausage if the map were to be believed. Hungary tended to make its own, but Greece and Turkey were surprisingly good markets. Down there to the right, tucked in a corner, was Australia, virgin land without a Czech sausage to its name, mysterious and far away from the nightmare. The centre of it seemed to have no town name for miles. This was the place for him. At night, he used to sit in the managing director's office and stare at this enormous island on the map, imagining the central space, unfulfilled, raw. Where there were no humans, there would be no inhumanity.

One day he knew instinctively that the moment for the great migration had come. It would have been unnatural if he had not developed a sense of impending disaster after his experiences, and now he realised there was no time to lose. Four days after he crossed the Austrian frontier, the Communists swept into power in Czechoslovakia, and once again slogans took the place of conversation.

From the International Refugee Organisation in Vienna, Jiří discovered that workers were urgently needed on several hydro-electric power schemes in the highlands of New South Wales. Within two weeks he was on board the Italian steamer *Salvatore Rosa*, heading towards Suez and freedom. The sea was calm and friendly; and he stood on deck, a slightly ludicrous figure in his thick collarless shirt, staring at the golden water as though it were a fire, a background for fantasy. He was not dreaming at all, since he had nothing to dream about. He had no imagination

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about the unknown. Even in the office, gazing at the empty map, he had thought only of the emptiness, not of imaginary landscapes. Reality had been too ferocious for him ever to ignore it, even as an escape. The sun had never been so hot, and it induced an exquisite drowsiness, the voluptuous sense of well-being which dogs express when they find a particularly satisfactory undulation in the ground and blink half blindly, waiting for sleep to overwhelm them. Jiři was as happy as he had ever been. At the same time, he could never roll up his sleeves because of that number branded on his arm, a relic of the Nazis' administrative efficiency.

He did not talk to the other immigrants. There were Italians, Hungarians, Germans—you could never tell who was who. Safer to keep quiet. If he bumped into someone, he apologised inaudibly, or if a passenger held open one of the heavy doors for him, he muttered his thanks under his breath. The last thing he wanted was to become involved with some other Czech and wallow in all the bleak miseries, all the premature homesickness of weaker spirits leaving their habits behind them. He wanted to be alone.

In Aden he bought a silly black pillow, his first purchase in years. Stitched on it in colours alternately electric and bilious were a snowcapped peak, its reflection in some uncertain water, a minaret, and a pine tree on a slope. "Souvenir of Aden." He had begun to build a home.

Sydney was much larger than he had thought, and he was both disappointed and frightened. Loneliness gripped him as his eye took in the skyline and his ear the traffic, the mumble of industry. Still, he did not stay there long but was soon on his way to the town of Billiwoonga in a large modern coach. His new land was strange, with its reckless majesty, its great green sweep, flecked with light and shade as the pregnant clouds passed in an endless procession from horizon to horizon.

Although the landscape was inanimate, it seemed to be in continuous motion. Billiwoonga, proudly marked on the map in somewhat heavier type than some of the surrounding towns, turned out to be a casual agglomeration of houses in the modern suburban style, reminiscent of married officers' quarters on some remote air base.

There was a Gothic church which might have wandered straight from a sad, misty section of London; a sparse little war memorial with one or two names on it remembered by the tiny bundles of flowers in its shadow; a row of shops; a long, low

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building boasting a wrought-iron arcade with tethering posts, proudly called the Royal Antipodes Hotel; and a very new construction in the contemporary bus station manner, where ex-servicemen could congregate, drink beer, play table tennis, and reminisce. Only the main street was tarred, and that only for a hundred yards or so beyond the town limits on either side.

The work on the hydroelectric scheme was tough, but the pay was good by any standards. He was perhaps a little old for some of its rigours, but the physical effort made him forget his troubles, and it was good to fall asleep out of sheer weariness. It was the week-ends he dreaded. This was not like the ship; there was no chance of escaping comradeship here. There was not even a chance of avoiding other Czechs, and soon an unreasoning homesickness began to bewilder him, a longing for a country which had only vaguely been his home, and then under oppressive circumstances.

It was a clash of lonelinesses which brought him and Ida together. She was a blonde girl well into the years of established spinsterhood who served powerful tea out of not too clean cups in the Anzac Café, a wooden shed which was cheerful enough, in a slightly desperate way, to emphasise the desolation outside. The blondeness of Ida was not of the kind that people are born with, and her skin was clogged with powder, which suggested a determined counter-attack against the callousness of time and the brutality of nature. Her powerfully aquiline nose and the watery blue eyes set comically low gave her an air of some German princeling related vaguely to international royalty at the turn of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, isolated from her head and stridently unmusical voice, her body was full and generous, as Jiří noticed whenever the copious bosom shuddered over his table. He found it more and more difficult to concentrate on the slender menu.

She was not unmoved by his attentions. Often she would shoot a glance of studied negligence in the direction of this miserable little fellow with eyes the colour of dry stones, who was too shy to raise his voice in ordering his tea. His smile was pleasant though, and she liked his walk as he came in, the underslung, jaunty walk of a light man of unexpected strength. The back of his neck had never grown up. It was defenceless and undernourished.

After a while, the little smiles, the hesitations over the choice of food, the awkward jokes about his bad English became a habit, and before long they left the café together. He knew from experience when the place closed, and he consequently went for his supper later and later. One day they found themselves on the

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pavement side by side. It was dark, and she put her arm through his. After a few yards they kissed, both more astonished than passionate. They had both given up hope so long ago.

She lay beside him in her narrow bed, and all her being was alive, craving, warm. When he closed his eyes, he knew that the most beautiful woman in the world was his and that he was the most desirable of men. The illusion of perfection has many levels, and, being an allusion, it is obedient to the mind.

The romance did not last long. They were too old to spend much time dragging a ration of conventional poetry out of the moon's presence on a night too cold for kissing. It was too late in life for them to excite each other with the suggestive words of popular songs, those prefabricated bits of utility seduction, pumped out around the clock by radio, the people's Casanova. For them were the moments of pleasant indolence snatched around a fire, the crackle of a newspaper, the impact of teacup and saucer, the song of the kettle, the feeling that they had known each other a long time, since youth perhaps—security.

Being a woman, however, and a big woman at that, Ida soon began to exercise those driving and sometimes sinister qualities which her sisters Messalina and Delilah and Lady Macbeth had put to effective use in more ample periods of history. Although both she and Jiři had so recently been forcibly content with mere survival, she took their new-found luck for granted much more quickly than he dared to and began to tell him that work on the hydroelectric scheme was beneath his dignity.

"But the money good," he would remonstrate, "sixty Owstralian pound a veek!"

"You're better than a mere labourer," was her reply, always uttered with absurd yet dangerous passion. "You got class. Look at those sensitive hands of yours. You goin' to spend your life in that crook tunnel now you've got me? Another Itie was blown to bits only last Friday, nice young fellow with a lovely singin' voice. Small wonder the money's good—the work's dangerous. No, Georgie, you've got responsibilities now, and it's time you was your own master."

What did she mean? He gazed at his hands and saw nothing particularly sensitive there—ten spatulate fingers culminating in corrugated nails. He must remember to clean them. Without arguments, he could only repeat, "Money good."

"Listen," she said softly, altering her feminine tactics with the grace of a locomotive, "you know Aldo Zenoni. He started work in the tunnel like all the other new Australian boys. Then he began patching clothing torn at work. They'd all come to him.

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He'd do a dinkum job, you see. Then one day he got married to an Irish girl, local girl. She gave him the confidence he was lackin'. That's what wives are for. He left the tunnel and set up shop. Now he's got the Venezia dress and men's wear store in Billiwoonga, with a branch in Canberra selling sweaters to the embassies."

"Yeah, that's one case," replied Jiři, miserably.

"One case? You seen them six-wheel trucks goin' around with that man's name on the door, that Polish man whose name nobody can pronounce? The biggest haulage contractor for miles. How did he start? In the tunnel. Kept his eyes open. Noticed there was a transport shortage. Started with one pre-war truck. Now he's got thirty, brand-new. Or take the Germans. They stick together, like the Jews. Old Heidelberg Cordial factory, Otto's Delicatessen, K.K. Dry Cleaning, the new garage on the corner of Snowy River Street and Imperial Way, the one that handles the Volkswagen—they're all German-owned, and the owners all came over to work on the tunnel. It's only no-hopers who go on working up in the mountains. 'Cause they make good money, but what they got to do with it? They come down here of a weekend with fifty, sixty, seventy quid in their pockets, and they go lookin' for women. There aren't any. Men outnumber women ten to one in Billiwoonga. You're lucky to have got me, you are. They get shickered, fight, and go back to the tunnel of a Monday dead-broke. I tell you, Georgie, them alecks from the tunnel's got a lot of money to spend. That's why the smarties stay in town and open up shop. There's prosperity when you've got a lot of men loaded with money and nothin' to spend it on."

There was no answer to this. It was true.

One day she added a curious note to her usual catalogue of temptations, saying, "I'll have to get you in with the Germans; they're the hardest workers."

Jiři had been in with the Germans before and had no desire to renew the experience, but when he talked, she no longer listened. She had a friend, a little younger than herself but quite as homely, a girl who had also braved the distant provinces in an unconscious search for men with less discriminating tastes. This person, whose name was Floss, had married one of the German colony of Billiwoonga, a Herr Willi Schumacher, now Mr. Bill Shoemaker, an enterprising immigrant who had founded a radio repair shop, to which he had added a sporting goods shop and even a small factory manufacturing carbonated beverages.

It was not long before the ambitious Ida had talked the head off Floss and even succeeded in penetrating the wary defences of

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Bill Shoemaker. Her idea was a restaurant which would be run by Jiři and herself on a partnership basis with the Shoemakers.

"I don't like to stick my neck out in a business I don't know," said Bill in his curious accent, half Australian, half German.

"Did you know the radio repair business when you went into it?" asked Ida with her usual fire.

"I was knowing how to mend a radio."

"Did you know about huntin' rifles and games of Scrabble and plastic dinghies?"

"Rifles, yes."

"And did you know about fizzy lemonades and all those crook drinks you put out? Well, I do know about the caterin' business, and, as for Georgie, he worked in a sausage factory back in Czechoslovakia where he came from. You've got a Syrian coffee-house in Billiwoonga, a Yugo-thing one, an Itie one, and not one German one, although you're the biggest group of new Aussies in town. A disgrace, I call it!"

"What a woman!" cried Bill with a chuckle, while Floss looked at her friend with more than a trace of jealousy.

When Jiři and Ida were married, Bill was best man, and the reception afterwards was held in the newly-painted shell of the Rhinegold Restaurant. It was a day of elation, although Jiři felt, every time he looked at Bill, that he had seen him somewhere before. The memory was not unpleasant; on the contrary, Bill had a rather agreeable face, a long turned-up nose, twinkling blue eyes, hair with a tendency to curl, and a huge mouth, which was always eager to smile. He was ever ready with a proverb for a given situation, but he chose well from his vast compendium of platitudes, and this extreme quickness on the draw with the correct folksy comment gave his personality a twist of irony which removed him from the body of struggling mankind. It was as though he saw and studied the paradoxes of existence from a point of vantage, and that inspired confidence. Jiři admired such a man.

"I toast our new partners, George and Ida, or should I say, Ida and George Pollen?" said Bill, raising his glass of Australian champagne; and, holding up a hand to silence the enthusiastic clapping, he went on. "I welcome the fact that Billiwoonga, the home for so many from us, will at last have a proper German–Czech–Central European restaurant of quality, where you can gather in an evening and enjoy Bratwurst, Königsberger Klopse, Kasseler Kippenspehr, and all the other dishes we remember and love from our home towns. We will give you quality with value,

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service with smiles, and I know I can trust you to give us your patronage. I now call upon Mr. Victor Ludlow to propose the toast of the newly-weds."

Mr. Victor Ludlow, who had arrived in Sydney Witold Lumbomirski from Lwów, made an eloquent speech about the George Pollens, describing them as symbols of the new Australia, which was rising like a phoenix from the conflagration of European despair, and pictures were taken in profusion by Mr. Bernie Peters, who was born Bratislav Petrosevic in Zagreb. Ida found it intensely romantic to be treated as an immigrant, and late in the day she attempted a drunken Serbian folk-dance to the accompaniment of an accordion, a fife, and two soup-spoons used as castanets. There were tears in many eyes as the party broke up. It had created a little intimacy, a little claustrophobia, in a land which so singularly lacked it.

Business was good. It could hardly be otherwise. The only problems were the weekend drunks and the licensing laws. Bill had been accorded a licence for beer and wines, but the sale of hard liquor in the Rhinegold was prohibited. Still, the lonely would force their way in on Saturdays and Sundays, begging for drinks in their various languages, and it was not always easy to refuse them. Not to break the law could be bad for business. Nobody, except the police, cares for a spoil-sport. The Rhinegold could soon afford a three-piece orchestra, which droned through the clink of cutlery as orchestras do the world over, making conversation impossible for those who have it and sparing the necessity for conversation in those without it.

As Monday was a slack day, Bill and George used to go hunting, like gentlemen in the Old World. It was on one of these jaunts that George told Bill of his feeling that they had met before. "Funny you should say that," Bill replied. "I was having the same feeling. Were you spending much time in Sydney?"

"One day."

"Ah, well, it couldn't have been there."

There was a pause as they scanned the horizon for ducks.

"In Europe maybe?" George ventured.

"I doubt it. I didn't get about much. As soon as the war was over, I was packing my bags and come out here."

"During the war—?"

"No. No, it couldn't be. Why, where were you to that time?"

"Me? Oh," George sighed. "You really want to know?"

"My motto is, ask no questions, you'll be told no lies."

"I've nothing to hide," said George. "I was in Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, Belsen, Dachau, Mauthausen, and some others."

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"You're not Jewish, are you?" asked Bill, raising his rifle to his shoulder.

"No. Why?"

"Most of them poor bastards ended up in the camps, at least so they tell to me."

"Oh, not only Jews."

"No? Well, I only go by what I'm told. That whole time I could have done without. Like pigs they were all behaving, everyone—we, the Allies . . . I never think of it."

"Where were you in that time?"

Bill brought down his rifle. "Me? Where you think? In the army. Medical orderly. To Greece, they sent me. And North Africa. The flies was worse than the enemy. Then I was getting out."

"How?"

"Ulcers."

"You had ulcers?"

Bill smiled. "No."

George looked at his friend in intense admiration. Even then he had the makings of a great industrialist.

Bill said softly, "You are not spending your time helping out a doctor without you learn something yourself."

It was on a Friday that Ida announced she was pregnant. It was scarcely credible, and yet Dr. Chalkburner, who, as Dr. Kalkbrunner, had been a leading specialist in Szeged, was categorical about it. Once again champagne was drunk, and George made a down payment on a small modern house. He also bought an American car, old but very large. His friend Bill gave him a magnificent hunting rifle when he heard the news. As George accepted the gift speechlessly, he racked his brains for all the kindnesses which he had ever known, trying to remember, trying to place his friend.

The Rhinegold expanded. It now had nearly thirty tables. As Ida's time drew near, extra help was hired. The standard dropped slightly, but people didn't notice. It had been established as the elegant meeting place in Billiwoonga.

Then, one morning when George was already at work, stock-taking, the phone rang. It was Dr. Chalkburner, who told him that Ida had been rushed to the local hospital and that there was nothing to worry about. George called Bill immediately. Bill told him to close the restaurant and that he would meet him at the hospital.

"We can't afford close the restaurant just for this," said

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George in the waiting-room when Bill arrived. "Is Saturday, best day of the week."

"Listen, you're not becoming a father every day," replied Bill. "I remember when young John was being born I was near broke. I was only having the radio store then, and we wasn't make too good a start, but I shut the shop. As I was leaving to come to the hospital, a customer she arrived. I was turning her away."

"All the same—Saturday."

Bill laughed pleasantly. "If the child is being born in the next few minutes, we can open the restaurant tonight. Don't worry about it. Here, I bring a bottle of schnapps, the real German schnapps. We need it." As they drank, George was overcome by conflicting emotions, those of joy and an intense, inexplicable sorrow. He was frightened for his wife. Everything in the waiting-room was so functional, so workaday; the weather was nondescript. It was hardly a fitting background for a great, a fearful event.

"What will you call it?" asked Bill.

George was grateful for his tact. Bill seemed to understand the anguish in his friend's heart, and his words were like stepping-stones over an abyss.

"If it's a girl, Ida. If is a boy, Malcolm."

"Why Malcolm?" asked Bill with genuine surprise.

"I don't know. Is a good name. So far from the names we know. When I think on my life, I not understand how I ever came to this position—almost a father, married, with a car and house and a business. Them camps, they was end of the world—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Bill, almost harshly, "but don't think of that now. In this Australia of ours, no-one has a past, everyone has a future. I never don't want to see Europe again. I know the food's better, the workmanship is better. There's more amusement, there is no licensing laws, but I want a future for my kids which is different from what I was knowing. By the time they is my age, this shall be a place worth living in, and God only knows what Europe shall be like."

"I ask to myself why we always is talk English to one other," said George. "We is both speak German better."

Bill refused to go home for lunch, and as the afternoon wore on and the schnapps dwindled, the relationship between the two men became warmer than it had ever been.

"I will never know how thank you, Bill."

"I need no thanks. You are a good worker, and a good worker is a good partner, and to have both together is good business.

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We have good wives. They're not beautiful, but beautiful wives means trouble. Wives should be good cooks, good housekeepers, good mothers, good in bed. That's all I am asking."

"Everything good."

"Everything good," echoed Bill.

Just then the nurse came in and announced in a measured, air-hostess voice that it was a boy. Malcolm Pollen had entered the world and, more particularly, Australia.

George would not hear of closing the restaurant, and at seven o'clock it was open for dinner and crowded. As the evening wore on, the usual drunks came in, begging for alcohol. Two in particular became obstreperous. One was German, the other a Czech. They banged the table and threatened to sing. They demanded that the three-piece orchestra play *Lili Marlene*.

George tried to reason with one in Czech. It did no good. The Czech began to weep and said he was far from home. What did he want? Slivovitz—to remind him. Bill came up to the table. The German drunkenly began to run down Australia and demanded liquor. Anything they had.

"Better give them some slivovitz in a coffee cup to keep them quiet," said Bill softly.

"When we serve them and they start break up the place, we not able call police. We no licence," said George.

"We'll say they come in here drunk."

"O.K., if you say."

A moment later, Bill glanced across at the drunks from behind the cash register. They were no longer drunk but were writing surreptitiously on bits of paper. He looked at the service hatch and saw the waiter approaching with two coffee cups on a tray. He rushed through the tables to intercept the waiter, and, just before the latter had reached the drunks, he pushed the tray on to the floor, shouting, "You clumsy idiot, can't you look what you doing?"

George came up when he heard the noise and saw Bill apologising to the drunks.

"Get hold of that cup on the floor," said one drunk to the other, now cold sober.

Bill trod on the cups.

George knew at once that the drunks were detectives from the Twenty-one Division, a curious flying squad of *agents provocateurs* employed by the government of New South Wales in order to cajole restaurateurs into breaking the licensing laws. Acting drunk was one of their most successful strategies, and they were not above using agents of various nationalities in order to play

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upon the patriotism and homesickness and, worse, kindheartedness of the immigrant innkeeper.

George could well imagine the kind of German or Czech who would leave his own country simply in order to become a policeman elsewhere. To him that was hardly the point of voluntary exile, but he knew there were people in the world who felt lost outside a uniform or at least outside the strait jacket of authority.

The German detective brusquely revealed his identity and demanded, in German, to examine the broken coffee cup. Bill went white with anger. He began shouting insults, also in German. A great vein, like a tree, rose and throbbed on his temple. For a moment, his fury seemed to spill over into epilepsy. The two detectives shouted back, and a few diners rose to add the weight of their opinions to the brawl.

George had never heard Bill speak German before, let alone shout it. Medical orderly? He saw a room full of naked people, men and women, some of transparent thinness, others bloated by hunger, and he smelled the odour of decomposition. The voice carried him back into the halflight, the white coats of the doctors, the parchment yellow of the naked flesh, the glint of glasses, the routine of the nightmare. Stout Dr. Tichte, loading his hypodermic dispassionately, swabbing with cotton wool, holding out his pudgy hands for implements. "Cough." "Cough." "Breathe." "Deeper." "Take him away." "Unusable." A quiet, rational voice. And behind him, in brown, under a brown cap, shouting hysterically, a great vein, like a tree, throbbing on his temple, another man. *"Still stehen!" "Schweine!" "Schweine!" "Judische Rassenschänder!"*

As the shouting increased in volume, George tottered to the kitchen and vomited on the floor. Now he remembered his friend. When he got home, the house was empty. Ida was in the hospital, sleeping in her pain and contentment. He switched on the lights. It was too light. He switched them off. It was too dark. He opened the window. It was too cold. He opened another one and stared into the night. He was burning with fever. He must kill his partner, as a memorial to those who had died uselessly. First, he must torture him. He played out the scene in his head a hundred times, perfecting it, polishing it. He saw Bill scream, cringe, beg for mercy in a hundred different ways. There would be no mercy. He would shoot him with his own gun, his present. There's irony.

But why all these presents? Why had this savage been so kind to him? Could it be that he had developed some kind of conscience? Had Bill remembered him when they had first met in

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Australia? Out of the millions who had passed through his hands in Mauthausen? Hardly. Even if he were only a symbol of contrition, however, it could be that good and evil were not equated in that unhappy heart and that he, George Pollen, had become the means by which Bill was able to look men in the face again. Nonsense. Bill had existed comfortably and commercially in Billiwoonga for a long time without such help.

"In this Australia of ours, no man has a past, every man has a future." How very convenient. It was made convenient by the Australians themselves. He remembered the rumours around the International Refugee Organisation in Vienna. America was hard to get into, even Canada insisted on a thorough screening, but Australia would take those rejected by the other two. Who could tell what venomous seeds were scattered in the wilderness?

The idea of murder gave him comfort, and he tried to sleep on the sofa. He dreamed, and his own shrieks awakened him. He looked at his watch. He had been asleep ten minutes.

A distant cock crowed, and a dog barked somewhere. He went out into the darkness and walked. He had no idea on which dirt road he was when dawn broke, but suddenly, after a few moments of slate-grey sadness, a vast, trumpeting sun burst over the black trees and a market-place of birds opened among the branches. The earth seemed to turn in her light sleep, and night died painlessly in a second.

It was hot almost at once in the sun, cold in the shadows. He stared at this curious land, at the weird boulders which had been scattered over the landscape during some prehistoric flatulence of the earth. The dying gum-trees stood among the dead, white unburied corpses, the aftermath of battle. Mauthausen again. The piles of bodies. He wanted to kick himself. That was self-pity, overdramatisation. The trees had died not out of malice but out of neglect, which was almost worse. They had been allowed to die; permission for them to die had been granted. And those still alive were waiting.

He shuddered. Life was valuable, and everything mattered. Near his foot, a civilisation of ants was building its empire, every bit as important as Australia, as Czechoslovakia, a microcosm, but none the less a world. The course of their labours took them over a large stone. They were building their hydroelectric scheme. He smiled slightly at the thought, then frowned as he realised that with one foot he could kill a squadron of them. He could do so easily, without remorse, since he could not communicate with them. A man cannot feel affection for an ant. Life is imperfect. *"Still stehen!" "Schweine!"*

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He was a father, for the first, doubtless the only, time in his life, a father in his late forties. It was a day of considerable importance, of joy. And yet here he was contemplating revenge. Oh, what to do? He held his head in his cupped hands and suddenly yawned. He was tired. When you are at a loss, nature takes over, irreverently, mockingly. He walked slowly back to town, his hands in his pockets.

If he broke the partnership, he would have to give up the house. By now he was probably too old for the tunnel. It would mean starting afresh, humbly. Was that fair for Ida or Malcolm? A new thought struck him. Could he have been mistaken about Bill? It was so long ago. He had heard so much shouting in his time. Voices resemble each other. They are bound to. Vocal chords have less range than faces, fewer possibilities for difference.

In his heart, he knew there was no mistake.

He would give the rifle back. A rifle, of all things, as a gift! How could he without explanation? Explanation would break up the partnership. He would either have to destroy utterly or to leave everything as it was. Ants.

Ten minutes later he was at home. He looked at his house, something where there had been nothing. Through the window he saw the cushion lying on the sofa, still dented where his head had been, "Souvenir of Aden." He had started with that. He opened the front door. A pram stood in the entrance hall, new and gleaming. A price tag was still fixed to the axle. He heard a noise behind him. There, before the door, its tail wagging, its ears sharp, its eyes both generous and febrile, stood a red kelpie, one of the multitude of stray dogs which infested Billiwoonga, chasing cars in the main street.

Georgie found these dogs a nuisance.

"Don't go away," he said, and fetched it a large meal from the kitchen.

At eleven o'clock he went to the restaurant, followed by the kelpie. Bill arrived shortly afterwards, haggard and furtive.

"It shall mean a thirty-quid fine," he said, "and there may be a charge for assault. Never mind, if I was having it over again, I would use the same language on those bastards."

"Those *schweine*," said George in German.

"*Ja, ja, Schweine. Schweinehunde*," replied Bill absently.

George continued to talk German. "Like the Gestapo," he said.

"*Genau. Die selbe Mentalitat. Dass die Australische Regierung hier so etwas erlaubt!*"

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"They exist everywhere," said George, still in German, "the police and others. It's not a question of uniform, it's a question of mentality. Creators and destroyers. Masters and slaves. An employee can be a master, an employer a slave, just as a policeman can be a human being and a man you'd never suspect can be a policeman. It's a question of mentality."

"I suppose there's something in that," murmured Bill, and then looked up suddenly with a hunted expression and asked, "Why are we talking German?"

"Oh, I don't know. Force of habit, I suppose," answered George.

"Force of habit?"

Bill blinked nervously, searching George's face. Suddenly Bill was pathetic, so strong was his desire to be liked. Every gesture was a bribe—the rifle, the schnapps—the payment of a debt on the instalment system.

"Force of habit. I'll be back soon. I'm going to the bank."

"To the bank?"

George left Bill looking after him through the restaurant window, and after a short visit to the bank he bought a bunch of flowers and walked to the hospital, still followed by the dog.

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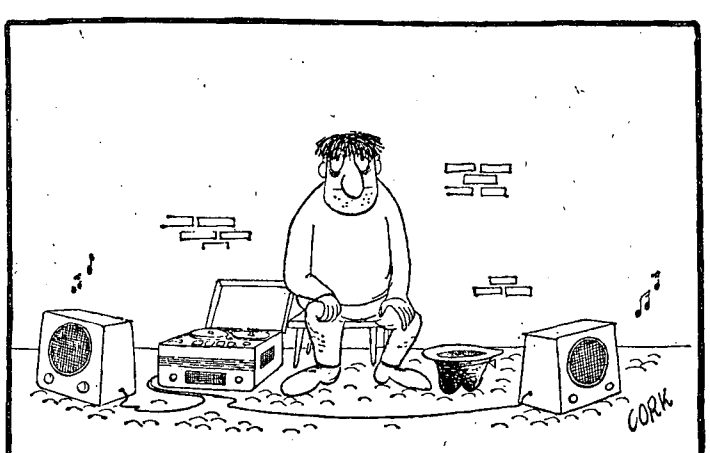
This story is taken from the author's new collection, "The Frontiers of the Sea", published by Heinemann at 21s.



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by Isaac Babel

YOU MUST KNOW EVERYTHING

ON Saturdays I always came home late, after my six lessons at school. Walking home through the streets never seemed to me a waste of time. It was very good for day-dreaming, and everything looked so nice and familiar. I knew all the signs, the stonework of the houses, the shop-fronts. I knew them in some special way all my own, and I was quite convinced that I saw in them what really mattered, that mysterious something that we adults call the "essence of things." It was all very firmly fixed in my mind.

If anybody happened to mention one of the shops, I could immediately picture its sign, with the gilt letters and the scratch in the left-hand corner, the girl cashier with her high hair-do and the aura clinging to the place, which was unlike the aura of any other shop. And it was from such shops, people, auras, and theatre posters that I pieced together my native city of Odessa. I remember, feel, and love it to this very day. I know it as one knows the fragrance of one's mother's skin—the flavour of love, words, smiles.

I love it because I grew up in it, was happy, sad, and dreamed my dreams—fervent dreams that will never return.

I always walked along the main street, which was the most crowded. The Saturday I am going to write about was at the beginning of spring. At that time of year, we didn't have that mild and soft air which, in Central Russia, is so exquisite over some quiet river or gentle valley. We had a slight glinting chill in the air, a hint of passion with a cold edge to it. I was just a child at the time and knew nothing about anything, but, blossoming and rosy-cheeked, I was affected by the spring just the same. I took my time on the way home from school. I scrutinised

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every jewel in the jeweller's shop and I read all the theatre posters from beginning to end.

Once, I was studying the pale-pink corsets with crinkly garters at Madame Rosalie's and was just about to move on when I bumped into a tall student with a large black moustache. He was grinning all over his face and he said, "Having a good look, eh?" I blushed. He gave me a knowing pat on the back and said condescendingly, "Keep it up, old fellow. Good for you! All the best!" He guffawed, turned on his heel, and walked away.

I was very embarrassed, went straight home, and never again stopped to gaze into Madame Rosalie's shop window.

I was supposed to spend this particular Saturday at home with my grandmother. She had her own room at the far end of the flat, behind the kitchen. In the corner of her room there was a stove; Grandmother always felt cold. It was always hot and stuffy in her room, and this made me miserable and I wanted to escape. On this day, I took all my paraphernalia—books, music stand, and violin—into Grandmother's room. The table was already laid for me. Grandmother sat in her corner while I ate. Neither of us said a word. The door was shut and we were alone.

For dinner I had cold *gefüllte fisch* with horseradish—a dish for the sake of which it would pay one to convert to Judaism—a thick, tasty soup, roast meat and onions, lettuce, fruit salad, coffee, pie and apples. I ate it all. I may have been a day-dreamer, but I also had an appetite.

Grandmother cleared the table, and the room became neat and clean. There were some sickly-looking flowers on the window-sill. The only living things that Grandmother loved were her son, her grandson, her dog Mimi and flowers. Mimi also came in, curled up on the sofa, and immediately fell asleep. She was a terrible sleepyhead but a wonderful dog—kind, sensible, small and good-looking. She was a pug, with a light-coloured coat. She had not grown fat and flabby in her old age but had kept herself in good trim. She lived out the whole of her life of fifteen years with us, from birth to death, and, naturally enough, she loved us all, particularly Grandmother, who was so hard and merciless.

Some other time I will tell the story of their silent and furtive friendship. It is a good, moving, and tender story.

Anyway there we were, all three of us—Grandmother, Mimi, and I. Mimi was sleeping; Grandmother, in a good humour, sat in the corner in her silk Sabbath dress; and I was supposed to do my lessons. It was a difficult day for me. I had already

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had six lessons at school, and now my music teacher, Mr. Sorokin, was supposed to come, and so was Mr. Liberman, my Hebrew teacher, to give a lesson we had missed. Peysson, the French teacher, might also come and I had to prepare a lesson for him. There would be no trouble with Liberman—we were old friends—but music and those scales were sheer misery!

I spread out my exercise books and began to do my lessons. Grandmother did not interrupt me—God forbid! Her face was drawn and blank because of her reverence for my work. She fastened her round, bright yellow eyes on me. Whenever I turned over a page, they followed the movement of my hand. Anybody else would have been made very ill at ease by this fixed and ever-vigilant gaze, but I had grown used to it. Later, she would listen to me rehearsing my lessons. She was at home only in Yiddish, and her Russian was very bad—she garbled it in her own peculiar way, using a lot of Polish and Jewish words. Of course, she couldn't read or write in Russian, and she would hold a Russian book upside down.

But this didn't prevent her from going through my lessons with me from beginning to end. She couldn't understand a word, but she listened intently, and the music of the words was sweet to her ears. She was full of reverence for learning, had great faith in me, and wanted me to become a rich man.

When I had finished with the lessons, I did some reading. At that time, I was reading Turgenev's *First Love*. I liked everything about it—the vivid words, descriptions, and conversations—but that afternoon I was particularly thrilled by the scene in which Vladimir's father strikes Zinaida on the arm with his riding crop. I could hear the swish of the whip and feel the momentary keen and painful sting of its supple thong. This upset me in some unaccountable way, and at this point I had to stop reading and walk up and down the room. But Grandmother just sat there without moving a muscle, and even the hot, stifling air was quite motionless, as though it knew that I was busy.

The room was getting hotter all the time. Mimi began to snore slightly. It was quiet—eerily quiet, with not a sound from the outside world. Everything seemed weird to me at that moment, and I wanted to run away from it all, but also to stay there for ever. The darkening room, Grandmother's yellow eyes, her tiny figure wrapped in a shawl, hunched up and silent in the corner, the heat, the closed door, the crack of the whip, its loud swish—only now do I understand how bizarre all this was, and how much it affected me.

I was startled out of my troubled state by the ringing of the

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doorbell. It was Mr. Sorokin. I hated him at that moment. I hated his wretched scales, all this meaningless, futile, squawking music. It must be said that Sorokin was a splendid fellow. He had close-cut hair, fine large hands, and magnificent full lips.

Today, under Grandmother's eye, he had to teach me for a whole hour—even a little over—and really give value for money. He got no credit for his pains. The old woman's eyes followed his every movement coldly and intently, and were quite indifferent and aloof to him. Grandmother had no time for strangers. She expected them to do their duty by us, and that was all.

We began our lesson. I was not afraid of Grandmother, but for a whole hour I had to bear the brunt of poor Sorokin's unusual devotion to duty. He felt very out of place in this remote room, in the presence of the peacefully sleeping dog and the frosty old woman sitting in the corner. At last he took his leave. Grandmother coldly gave him her large leathery and wrinkled hand, but she made not the slightest movement with it. As he left, he bumped into a chair.

I endured the following hour as well—Mr. Liberman's Hebrew lesson—and the moment came when the door closed behind him, too. By now it was nightfall. Faraway specks of gold lit up in the sky. The deep shaft of our courtyard was flooded with moonlight. In the neighbours' flat, a woman's voice began to sing, "Why do I love you so madly?" The rest of my family had gone to the theatre. I felt depressed and tired. I had read so much and done such a lot of work.

The servant girl brought in the samovar. Grandmother lit a lamp. This immediately mellowed the room; the dark, massive furniture was bathed in soft light. Mimi woke up, took a walk through the other rooms and then came back to us to wait for supper. Grandmother was a great tea drinker. She had kept a gingerbread for me. We both drank a lot of tea. The sweat began to glisten in the deeply-etched seams of her face. "Do you want to go to bed?" she asked.

"No," I replied. We began to talk, and once again I listened to Grandmother's stories.

Long, long ago, there was a Jew who kept an inn. He was poor, married and weighed down by a large family, and he sold vodka without a licence. A government inspector came to see him and started making trouble for him. He went to a rabbi and said, "Rebbe, a government inspector is plaguing the life out of me. Ask God to help me."

"Go in peace," the rabbi said to him, "the government inspector will quieten down." The Jew went home. He found the

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inspector on the doorstep of his inn. He was lying there dead, with his belly all purple and swollen up.

Grandmother fell silent. The samovar hummed away. The neighbour was still singing. Everything was covered with blinding moonlight. Mimi began to wag her tail—she was hungry.

"In the old days, people had faith," Grandmother said. "Life was simpler. When I was a little girl, the Poles rebelled. We lived next to the estate of a Polish count. The Czar himself used to come and visit him. They used to make merry for seven days at a stretch. I would run up to the hall after dark and look in through the lighted windows. The count had a daughter, and she had the finest pearls in all the world. Then there was this rebellion. Some soldiers came and dragged the old count out on to the square. We all stood around and cried. The soldiers dug a hole in the ground. They wanted to blindfold the old man, but he said he didn't want it. He stood in front of them and gave them the order to shoot. He was a big man with grey hair. The peasants liked him. Just as they were burying him, a courier came racing up. He had a pardon from the Czar."

The samovar was slowly going out. Grandmother drank her last glass of tea, which had gone cold by now, and sucked a piece of sugar in her toothless mouth.

"Your grandfather," she said, "was a great one for telling stories. He didn't believe in anything, but he trusted people. He gave away all his money to his friends, but when he came to them for help they threw him downstairs, and that made him a little queer in the head." And she went on to tell me about my grandfather.

He was a big man with a sharp tongue, passionate and overbearing. He played the violin, wrote essays at night, and knew all languages. He was ruled by an insatiable thirst for knowledge and life. A general's daughter had fallen in love with their elder son, and this had been the son's undoing. He became a wanderer and a gambler, and he died in Canada at the age of thirty-seven. All Grandmother had left was my father and me. Everything else was gone. For her, day was turning into night and death was coming slowly.

She fell silent again, then lowered her head and began to cry. "Study!" she suddenly said with great vehemence. "Study and you will have everything—wealth and fame! You must know *everything*. The whole world will fall at your feet and grovel before you. Everybody must envy you. Do not trust people. Do not have friends. Do not lend them money. Do not give them your heart!"

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She said no more. There was silence in the room. She was thinking about years gone by and all her troubles. She was thinking about my future, and her stern commandments pressed down heavily—and for ever—on my weak, untried shoulders.

In the dark corner, the iron stove glowed red-hot and gave off a fierce heat. I was hot and stifled and I wanted to run outside into the fresh air and escape, but I hadn't even the strength to raise my head. There was a crash of crockery in the kitchen. Grandmother went in there. It was supper-time. The next moment, I heard her harsh and angry voice. She was shouting at the servant girl. I felt awkward and upset. She had just been full of such peace and sadness. The servant was answering back.

"Get out, you little slut!" I heard my grandmother shout with uncontrollable rage, in an unbearably loud and shrill voice. "I am the one who gives orders here! You are breaking my things. Get out!" I could not stand the raucous, metallic sound of her voice. I could see her through the half-open door. Her face was taut, her lower lip was trembling with fury, her throat was all swollen. The servant was trying to reply.

"Get out!" Grandmother said. Now everything was quiet. The servant with hunched shoulders and on tiptoe, as though she was afraid to hurt the silence, crept out of the kitchen.

We had supper without exchanging a single word. We ate well and plentifully, and took our time over it. Grandmother's translucent eyes were motionless and I did not know what they were looking at.

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WAITING

by the rebellious poet of to-day's Russian youth, Yevgeny Yevtushenko

My love will come
will fling open her arms and fold me in them,
will understand my fears, observe my changes.
In from the pouring dark, from the pitch night
without stopping to bang the taxi door
she'll run upstairs through the decaying porch
burning with love and love's happiness,
she'll run dripping upstairs, she won't knock,
will take my head in her hands,
and when she drops her overcoat on a chair,
it will slide to the floor in a blue heap.

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WILLIAM BURROUGHS

A famous name—reviled by some, praised by others . . . Now Argosy offers a sample of his way-out style

They do not always remember

IT was in Monterey Mexico . . . a square a fountain a café. I had stopped by the fountain to make an entry in my notebook: *dry fountain empty square silver paper in the wind frayed sound of a distant city.*

"What have you written there?"

I looked up. A man was standing in front of me barring the way. He was corpulent but hard-looking with a seared red face and pale grey eyes. He held out his hand as if presenting a badge but the hand was empty. In the same movement he took the notebook out of my hands.

"You have no right to do that. What I write in a notebook is my business. I don't believe you are a police officer."

Several yards away I saw a uniformed policeman thumbs hooked in his belt. "Let's see what he has to say about this."

We walked over to the policeman. The man who had stopped me spoke rapidly in Spanish and handed him the notebook. The policeman leafed through it. I was about to renew my protests but the policeman's manner was calm and reassuring. He handed the notebook back to me: said something to the other man who went and stood by the fountain.

"You have time for a coffee señor?" the policeman asked. "I will tell you a story. Years ago in this city there were two policemen who were friends and shared the same lodgings. One was Rodriguez. He was content to be a simple *agente* as you see me now. The other was Alfaro. He was brilliant, ambitious and rose rapidly in the force until he was second in command. He introduced new methods . . . tape recorders . . . speech prints. He even studied telepathy and took a drug

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once which he thought would enable him to detect the criminal mind. He did not hesitate to take action where more discreet officials preferred to look the other way—the opium fields, the management of public funds, bribery in the police force, the behaviour of policemen off duty. Señor, he put through a rule that any police officer found drunk and carrying a pistol would have his pistol-permit cancelled for one flat year, and what is more he enforced the rules. He made enemies.

"One night he received a phone call and left the apartment he still shared with Rodriguez—he had never married and preferred to live simply, you understand—just there by the fountain he was struck by a car. An accident? Perhaps. For months he lay in a coma between life and death. He recovered finally . . . perhaps it would have been better if he had not." The policeman tapped his forehead. "You see the brain was damaged . . . a small pension . . . he was retired from the force. Alfaro still does not know this. He thinks he is a major of police and sometimes the old Alfaro is there . . .

"I recall an American tourist, cameras slung all over him, protesting, waving his passport. There he made a mistake. I looked at the passport and did not like what I saw. So I took him along to the *comisaría* where it came to light the passport was forged—the American tourist was a Dane wanted for passing worthless cheques in twenty-three countries including Mexico. A female impersonator from East St. Louis turned out to be an atomic scientist wanted by the FBI for selling secrets to the Chinese. Yes, thanks to Alfaro I have made important arrests. More often I must tell to some tourist once again the story of Rodriguez and Alfaro." He took a toothpick out of his mouth and looked meditatively at the end of it. "I think Rodriguez has his Alfaro and for every Alfaro there is always a Rodriguez . . . They do not always remember." He tapped his forehead. "You will pay the coffee yes?"

I put a note down on the table.

Rodriguez snatched it up. "This note is counterfeit, señor. You are under arrest."

"But I got it from American Express two hours ago."

"*Mentiras!* You think we Mexicans are so stupid? No doubt you have a suitcase full of this filth in your hotel room."

Alfaro was standing by the table smiling. He showed a police badge. "I am the FBI señor . . . the Federal Police of Mexico. Allow me."

He took the note and held it up to the light. Smiling he

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handed it back to me. He said something to Rodriguez who walked out and stood by the fountain. I noticed for the first time that he was not carrying a pistol. Alfaro looked after him shaking his head sadly. "You have time for a coffee señor? I will tell you a story..."

"That's enough!" I pulled a card out of my wallet and snapped crisply, "I am District Supervisor Lee of the American Narcotics Department and I am arresting you and your accomplice Rodriguez for acting in concert to promote the sale of narcotics—caffeine among other drugs."

A hand touched my shoulder. I looked up. A grey-haired Irishman was standing there with calm authority, the face portentous and distant as if I were recovering consciousness after a blow on the head they do not always remember. "Go over there by the fountain, Bill. I'll look into this."

I could feel his eyes on my back see the sad head shake hear him order two coffees in excellent Spanish... dry fountain empty square silver paper in the wind frayed sounds of distant city... everything grey and fuzzy... my mind isn't working right... who are you over there telling the story of Harry and Bill? The square clicked back into focus. My mind cleared. I walked towards the café with calm authority.

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NEW TECHNIQUES, NEW EFFECTS. One of the most talked-about of living authors is American-born, European-based William Burroughs. Controversial—because of his tradition-smashing style in the pursuit of new effects. One of his unconventional effects consists of cutting up his manuscripts and pasting together disparate parts to establish "new connections between images". His best known books are *The Naked Lunch, Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (FEBRUARY ISSUE)

ACROSS. 1, *Jackal.* 4, *Improper.* 9, *Shells.* 10, *Reaction.* 12, *Inundate.* 13, *Mussel.* 15, *Eyot.* 16, *Do one's best.* 19, *Musical box.* 20, *Cram.* 23, *Nylons.* 25, *Diagonal.* 27, *Macaroni.* 28, *Angora.* 29, *Misnomer.* 30, *Raised.*

DOWN. 1, *Jasmine.* 2, *Credulous.* 3, *Allude.* 5, *Mien.* 6, *Recourse.* 7, *Pains.* 8, *Ringlet.* 11, *Strolls.* 14, *Antonio.* 17, *Erroneous.* 18, *Scenario.* 19, *Minimum.* 21, *Mallard.* 22, *Agenda.* 24, *Laces.* 26, *Anne.*

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OOM BENNIE WAS MORE THAN SPECIAL, FOR HIS WAS THE BUGLE-CALL OF MIRACLES

The Bugle

by Tom Macdonald

WHEN people in the lowveld asked Oom Bennie where all the children had come from, he would say that he remembered starting with two, and then the number just went on growing. Now he had to think hard before he could remember the exact number. But they were all his children, and while he had breath in his body and tobacco in his pipe, nobody would take one of them from him. He would lay the law down about that by jerking his old calabash from the nest of his white beard, and using it, with more jerks, to emphasise his words.

The calabash was yellow-brown with age and smoke. So was Oom Bennie's face, egg-brown, but the eyes were young; almost as young as a child's, the people said. He was tall, with a slight stoop now. He wore veldskoen which he had himself made from buck hide, and, more often than not, he went about in clothes which he had made from the pelts of wild animals he had shot. He had tanned the hides. They included wildcat furs and the spotted pelts of leopards.

He had karosses for his own bunk and the bunks of all the children, and all these he had also made himself from the skins of wild animals. He was as deft with his fingers as a woman, and

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the karosses were like quilts of many colours. He had also made the bunks, mostly from the wood of the wild olive.

Not that you needed much covering for beds in the lowveld, the low country of the Northern Transvaal, for, except in the short winter, the nights were warm. And in summer they were hot. Even in the winter the sun was hot by day and there was need for few clothes. The sun tanned you until your skin was as smooth as the pelt of an animal.

As a young man he had been in the lowveld when it was rotten with malaria. He had dug for gold in the hills of Pilgrims' Rest and had panned it in the creeks. When the alluvial had petered out and the villages in the hills began to be deserted, he had wandered back to Pretoria. But he was no sooner there than he was riding to war against the English. He went through it without a scratch. The nearest he got to being hurt was when his horse was shot dead under him. He slid off its back as it fell.

When the war was over he worked for a time in the goldmines in Johannesburg, but he never got used to the great darkness in the belly of the earth, and he had always thought that digging for gold in the huge gold factory of Johannesburg was crazy. It was not like the wonder of finding it in the creeks of Pilgrims' Rest where the hills were green, and where now and again you might find a nugget as big as a tidy egg.

He had done so many odd jobs, while he had never lost his nostalgia for the lowveld. He had seen his old wife die. And then his only son and his wife had been killed in a car smash. There were two children, Petrus and Sannie, Petrus five and Sannie three.

He had been living with the family in a small house a few miles out of Pretoria. His friends and neighbours told him that he should put the children into a home. They should have slapped him across the face instead. They were his grandchildren. They belonged to him and nobody could take them away. He was asked how he could bring them up on his oudstryder's pension of nearly ten pounds a month. He wasn't a veteran of war for nothing.

It was then through the smoke of his calabash that he thought of the low country, where it was nearly always sunshine; the banks of the Olifants River where he had once camped, and where with his old gun he would always be able to find meat for the pot. There the loam was rich and he could clear a few thorn trees and make a garden. Grow pawpaws, avocados and tomatoes. And even pineapples. A little maize and his own tobacco.

He had always dreamed of growing his own tobacco. He had

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worked for a time on a tobacco farm out of Brits, some of the best tobacco country in the Transvaal. He had seen how the leaves were cured. To pay nothing for tobacco, that would be a godsend. He had heard, too, that the lowveld could become a granary, that the malarial mosquito had been conquered and that the country was now healthy. He remembered its vastness, its silences. It could be a sanctuary for his old Boer independence, far from the smoke of the chimney of any neighbour. He made his decision. He would take the children to the country of the everlasting sun.

"And maybe one day you'll ride on the backs of lions," he told them.

"But, Oupa," said Petrus, and he was black-eyed and as bright as a needle, "lions eat people."

"We'll tame them, Petrus," he said. "And you'll always be warm like a baby baboon in the arms of its mother," he told Sannie.

She was fair and blue-eyed. She wriggled with delight.

ONE day they marched into the blue out of Pretoria, and Bennie had all they owned in the world on his back. He had sold the bits of furniture.

They hadn't gone far when a farmer gave them a lift. He was a fat, comfortable man who ran a cattle ranch in the koppies out of Pietersburg.

"Going far?" he asked, when the children were in the back seat and Bennie sat beside him in front.

"We're going to the lowveld, meneer," said Bennie. "Somewhere by the Olifants."

"You going to see relations then?"

"Well, no, meneer. I don't think we have any in the world. The children and I are going to start a new life."

The farmer looked at Bennie quizzically. "What will you live on?" For he could see that Bennie was old, although his eyes were young.

"I'm an oudstryder, meneer. I have my pension."

The farmer's eyes were warm in their pouches. "Ah, so you fought for our country against the damned English. So did my father. But is that little pension enough to live on?"

"I get a few shillings a week for the children," and he pointed the stem of his calabash over his shoulder. "But you see, when I find a patch of land I'll build a little house and grow a few crops. I'm a handy man with trowel and stone. And I'll find thatch

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enough on the banks of the Olifants. I'll harden the mud floor with the blood of animals. I'll make bits of furniture from hardwood. Finest wood in the world, meneer. Table and chairs, and I'll even make beds."

"I see you have a gun," said the farmer. "I take it that it's safe in the back at the children's feet."

"It isn't loaded. I've always had a gun since the war."

"What a world it will be for the children," said the farmer.

"Ja, meneer. Miles and miles of the beautiful veld and the great trees. And the sun. They won't need much clothes."

The farmer sighed. "Hardly any at all. That's the place for children. But the time will come when they'll have to go to school."

"I'll read to them from two books, meneer. The old Bible, my mother's, which is with my gun; and the other will be the living book of the lowveld and the animals, and I'll tell them stories of the war when I shot all those Englishmen."

They laughed together. "But in a few years the authorities will insist on you sending them to school."

"They can insist," said Bennie. "But nobody tells me what I must do. All over the world people are quarrelling like wild dogs, and so many countries have got the hell-bomb now. Maybe they'll blow up their world, and we'll be safe by the Olifants."

"But some day you'll die yourself."

"I've many years to go. By then Petrus and Sannie will be grown-up. I'm only seventy-two. When I get to the lowveld where there is no noise or contentions to nag the nerves, I'll live to be a hundred easily."

By now the farmer had seen the eagerness in Bennie and the whipcord in his spare frame, so that he didn't doubt that Bennie might reach a hundred.

"What a happy man you are. But what's your name? Mine's Van der Walt."

"And mine's Becker, but everybody calls me Oom Bennie."

"How I envy you, Oom. Here I am a fairly well-to-do farmer, but I have the worries of drought or too much rain; diseases in my stock. I could become a pauper."

"The Lord is good," said Bennie.

"But we are stubborn, Oom. You'll be as free as the wind with few possessions, so you'll never have much to lose in any disaster. I know the Olifants country. It used to be boiling with elephants, as the name implies. There are some elephants there now."

"It's lion country, too."

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For the first time Petrus spoke. "Sannie and me are going to ride the lions," he said.

Bennie winked at the farmer, who said, "I wouldn't be surprised, with your Oupa around, that you won't be riding elephants too."

"I'm going to have a lion cub for a kitten," said Sannie.

"That's a certainty," said the farmer.

Bennie told him how the children had fallen to him.

"People said that I should put them in an institution. That was an insult."

"They thought that you might be too old for them. To care for them, you know."

Bennie snorted and a shower of ash fell into his lap of old corduroy. He brushed it off. Before he could say anything, the farmer said, "Of course, you're not really old. It's the spirit that counts and you've got it. The freedom you're going to find. No taxes even to pay."

Bennie laughed. "That'll be the day when they get me to pay taxes."

They rolled along in the sun on the black python road and the veld stretched to far, blue horizons. They saw the koppies clothed in golden grasses, and herds of cattle and placid cows by sun-kissed dams.

All the time Bennie smoked, filling his pipe as soon as it was empty with dark tobacco from a linen bag.

"You love your pipe, Oom."

"After the children it's the only love of my life. Down by the Olifants I'll grow my own tobacco."

"Ja, a few farmers grow fine tobacco there. You'll have plenty of meat and tobacco."

"Grow my own tobacco and shoot my own meat. That's fare for a man; all he needs, meneer, when he loses his appetite for women. I'll brew a little drink, too. I'm partial to a little drink."

"It's good for one, Oom."

The farmer was thinking. The old man could still be useful; but he was more concerned with the children. He had no children himself, and now he and his wife were middle-aged. A home without children was like a house without a fire.

"Freedom is a wonderful thing, Oom. But I'm a little concerned about the children."

"They will live and play in a beautiful world, meneer. And if you're still thinking about their schooling, I've told you of the school I want for them."

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The farmer saw through the rear mirror that the children huddled close, fast asleep.

"They're sleeping," he said.

Bennie turned his head to look at them and a swift smile lit up his mouth. "Like pups together. That's how they always sleep," he said. "They're as good as angels. But it's no use, meneer. I can read your mind."

"Let's have it then."

"You'd like to give me odd jobs on the farm and you'd like to look after the children; give them a better chance in the world."

"I was thinking that way, Oom."

"No, I'm going to take them to the place of my dreams. But if something should go wrong, I'll arrange for them to go to you."

"You promise that?"

With a jerk of the pipe, Bennie said, "My oath on it. I shall send a message to Pietersburg for you to come to fetch them."

The farmer said that he lived on the farm Rustfontein, seven miles out of Pietersburg. When they reached the town he insisted on taking them to a hotel for lunch. He bought the children sweets and two bags of tobacco for Bennie. Then they all shook hands.

Bennie and the children walked outside the town, and they were given a lift down through the tree country of Magoeba, past Tzaneen in its cup of a valley, and late in the afternoon they found themselves on the side of a dirt road. They went into the bush and, under an umbrella thorn-tree, they slept the night on the warm earth.

THEY wandered the country for weeks. Then one day, on the banks of the brown river of the Olifants, they came on a bit of ruined house where once an emerald-digger had lived. It was in a glade surrounded by thorn trees. Bennie dropped his pack and announced that they had reached home. They were ten miles on a rough veld track from the nearest small town of Olifantsdorp, which had one store, with one corner used as a post office, where he could pick up his pension every month, a tiny school and a police station. There were a few houses and a tavern. The men worked in a marble quarry a few miles away.

From the first night they knew that they were in lion country, because they heard lions roaring in the distance. In the night elephants had passed down to the river to drink.

They had only to walk about a mile on the game tracks to be

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able to climb a small koppie which gave them a view of miles of trees. They saw buck, antelope and giraffe. But what thrilled the children most was that they were close to the great river, more than a hundred yards wide. Game tracks led to it and the mud on the banks was criss-crossed with the spoors of animals. On a far bank they saw crocodiles, and in a deep pool a hippo diving.

"Never," Bennie admonished them, "must you wander far from my side."

They promised they never would.

"It will take us some time to tame lions," he said. "We have before us a lot of work to build our house."

They were thrilled by the way he made bricks out of river clay. He had made a mould. He baked the bricks in the sun. When they were bone dry he added them to the walls.

"Some day," he often told them, "I'll get a real gun, but the old one will have to do until we come into some money."

They slept on beds of skins. He made stools from thorn wood. He made seats for the stools with strips of hide. They ate in the open with tremendous appetites. They had a fire burning all night and the elephants and the lions stayed away.

"They don't like fire," he told the children.

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From hide, which he tanned, he made them veldskoen, but mostly they went barefoot to harden their feet.

Curious Africans often came round, but they were very polite. One day there was a group of them, men and women, and some carried babies in blankets on their backs. They crossed the river in single file and beat the water with sticks to frighten away the crocodiles. They were above their waists in the water. They sang while they slapped the water, and they all crossed safely to the other side.

"See, Oupa," said Petrus, "the Kaffirs are not afraid of the crocs."

"But they were many," said Bennie. "When you grow a little more you'll swim across. But you've got to watch them old crocs. They pull down a big buck, you know. The only one who isn't afraid of them crocs is the hippo. The crocs never tangle with the river cow."

They liked to sit on the banks of the river, watching the brown swirl of the water, watching a hippo rise in a far pool with a baby on its back. A host of red- and yellow-breasted weavers nested in the reeds, their nests dangling. All day the birds chattered and flew in flashes of colour.

"Oupa, I'd like a red bird," said Petrus.

"And I'd like a yellow," said Sannie.

"They don't like living in cages," said Bennie. "Let them be free."

For many days a piccanin had appeared on the opposite bank. He wore a tiny moochi. That was all. Otherwise he was black and bare and shining. You could see the white of his teeth as he smiled. He looked lonely as he made animals and birds from mud on the bank. He waved to them when he went back to his hut in the evening. In the morning he would be back again.

Oupa talked the Kaffir language and in no time they picked up words. So Petrus called to the boy, "Why are you so lonely?"

After many repetitions, and with the aid of Bennie, they understood him to say that he had no brothers or sisters.

Then why didn't he swim across to them, and maybe he could help them and Oupa in building the house? He said he'd have to be a little bigger. Then he wouldn't be afraid of the crocodiles.

"Then you'd better grow up quickly," they told him.

He told them that his name was John. He said that his father worked in a gold-mine in Johannesburg and his mother on a farm. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. All they could do was to talk across the river. He told them that he knew all about the birds and the snakes and the animals.

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When it rained, and it often did in great rods until the river swelled into flood, it would be days before John appeared again on the other side of the river.

One day, when they were modelling clay themselves, a shadow fell across them and they looked up to see a policeman. He had three stripes on the sleeve of his jacket. Where was their Oupa? They said that their Oupa had gone hunting, for they were out of meat.

"You don't want Oupa for anything bad?" asked Petrus, rising to his full height and looking up into the face of the sergeant.

"Oh, no," he said.

They told him their names. When they got back to the house, which was only a quarter done, they saw Oupa with a small buck on his shoulder.

He looked suspicious when he saw the sergeant, who introduced himself as Sergeant Jacobus Vorster from Olifantsdorp. In no time he was calling their Oupa "Oom".

"How did you come, Sergeant?" asked Bennie.

"I've left the car about two miles away. Track's too rough."

Why had he come? Sergeant Vorster lit his pipe. He was a hulk of a man with a round face and he always seemed to be half smiling. Now he gave a full smile. "I've heard about you, Oom, with the two children in the bush. I wanted to see if you were looking after them."

"Look at them, Sergeant."

"Ja, they are as fit as lion cubs, Oom." He looked down at Petrus. "But he'll be ready for school soon. And that's ten miles away."

"I read the Bible to them. I tell them stories, and they're learning things from the book of the veld."

"What would happen if you fell ill?"

"I've never had a doctor in my life. Never will. As I told Meneer van der Walt, who gave us a lift to Pietersburg when we were coming to the lowveld, I'll live to be a hundred and then they'll be man and woman."

"The land is full of snakes, Oom. What if a snake bit you? Or one of the children?"

"I've got the snake serum. Snakes run away always. Now listen, Sergeant. I ran away with the children to save them from going to an orphanage. I'm giving them a real home. I haven't been to the post office in Olifantsdorp yet, but there I'll get new forms to get the ten shillings a week each for the children from

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the government. Then with my pension as an oudstryder there will be fourteen pounds a month."

"That isn't much, Oom."

"It costs us little to live, Sergeant."

On Sundays they didn't hunt or work. He read the Bible to them. No, he hadn't a licence for the old gun. He didn't intend to have one.

"I handled a gun for my country, Sergeant, and I have the right of a free man to carry a gun."

"It's against the law to have no licence, Oom."

"I've never had anything to do with the law all my life and I'm certainly not going to start at my age."

What would he do with the children when he had to go to the dorp?

"Every half-mile when they get tired I'll carry one, and then I'll put one down and pick up the other. And if it comes to it I'll carry them both."

Sergeant Vorster laughed roundly. "Nothing is any trouble to you, Oom."

"Why should it be? Life is wonderful and the sun shines most times, and there's food on the doorstep. I shall even grow bananas. And one day I'm going to fill your pipe with my home-grown tobacco."

He insisted on giving the sergeant a leg of the buck before he left. He was going to the dorp on the Friday.

ON Friday Petrus wore his khaki shirt and shorts and Sannie wore a floral frock. They hadn't worn the clothes since they had come to the lowveld. They were about two miles out of the thorn land when they saw a car weaving towards their track. There was Sergeant Vorster beaming at the wheel.

"I was out on patrol, Oom," he said. "Going to the dorp?"

"Ja," said Bennie.

"Well, in you get. And you, Sannie and Petrus—how smart you are!"

In the dorp, at the police station they met the magistrate, Frans Schoeman. Bennie was wary. Had the policeman set a trap for him?

Then he was sorry for the thought. The sergeant was a gentleman.

Meneer Schoeman was a small man with a goatee beard and blue eyes, and the children warmed under their look. His headquarters were at Tzaneen. Every month he visited Olifantsdorp.

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Bennie filled several forms, and he took an oath that the information was nothing but the truth. The forms would go to Pretoria and at the end of each month he would pick up the money at the post office.

They went to the store where a crowd of Africans mustered outside. When they entered the store the eyes of Petrus and Sannie bulged when they saw that the store had everything in the world.

The boss was an old, bald-headed, full-faced man called Jim Spooner, who left off cutting a piece from a bolt of cloth to greet them.

"You're the bloke who lives far away in the veld with these two nippers," Jim said in English.

"Ja, man, that's me. Say, you looks like an old sodger."

"I was in the Boer War with Lord Roberts."

They shook hands. They had fought on opposite sides, but they respected one another.

"It was a gentleman's war," said Jim. "What fighters you was, you damn Boers."

"Ja, you damned Engelsman, coming for to steal our country."

"But that's all over, Oom. We all belong to the country now."

Jim took a cheroot from a garish packet and offered one to Bennie.

"No," said Bennie, pouring tobacco from the lip of a little bag into his calabash.

Jim lit his cheroot, took it from his lips, looked at the burning top, then stuck it in the corner of his mouth.

"Listen," he said. "You and the kinders must have lunch with me."

They did. Bennie and Jim made a hole in a bottle of brandy and the children had cold drinks. The men were lost in talking about the war, mentioning battles, defeats, victories, Paul Kruger and old Queen Victoria. They were Jim and Bennie to one another for ever.

"Bennie man, how I envy you living there in Gawd's own veld with no worries. And me—here I am tied to this damn store, like an elephant in a snare."

"You have no woman, Jim?"

"My wife died years ago."

"Any time you like, you come down to my place for a bit of shooting, Jim."

"I'll come, Bennie. Some day this old store can burn up, for all I cares. I'll come and we'll fight the war all over again. They're a couple of fine kids all right. That's the way to bring 'em up.

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"And you kids," he said to them. "You call me Uncle Jim. Uncle is the English for Oom."

"Ja, Uncle," they said.

Bennie bought a few groceries and flour, tobacco, cartridges, a new axe. Jim put them down in a little book. Bennie would pay when he got his money. Jim didn't charge for the sweets for the children.

"Not this time," he said.

"Dankie, Uncle," they said to him.

Jim was waving them down the road when Meneer Schoeman pulled up his car alongside. He took them to the spot where the sergeant had picked them up that morning. He said that he knew the bush tracks so well that he could weave his way almost blindfold to the main road to Tzaneen.

"Meneer," said Bennie, "Any time you like, come to our place for a bit of shooting."

"I'll be coming some day, Oom."

Next day, Petrus and Sannie told Jim across the river of their day in the dorp, and they were sorry they couldn't throw any sweets across. They had even asked Oupa if he couldn't put them in the gun and shoot them across.

"Tell you what, John," said Petrus. "We were so glad of getting out of our dorp clothes."

Now they were both wearing new moochis made of jackal skin.

Another day that week John told them that his mother was waiting for a crowd to cross the river, and he would be coming across because his mother was going to Johannesburg to find his father, from whom she hadn't heard for months. He'd like to stay with them until she came back.

"Tell your Oupa that I'll work for him," said John.

Petrus ran to the house, where Bennie was fixing some new bricks, and told him.

"Of course," said Bennie. "He'll be a help in looking after you two."

But they waited a week. Then one afternoon they saw a crowd of black people on the far bank and they came swirling the water, beating the water, and John was on his mother's shoulders. Yes, she told Bennie, she was going to walk all the way to Johannesburg, hundreds of miles, to find her lost husband. She'd be away a long time, but she would come back when her quest was done. She and John parted as casually as if she were only going to Olifantsdorp.

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John was a little Shangaan, and they soon marvelled how he knew the veld. When he killed a mamba, twice as long as himself, their friendship was cemented, for Oupa said that the mamba was the most terrible of snakes. But they mustn't go hunting snakes, he told them.

In no time John was talking a lot of Afrikaans and the children were talking a lot of Shangaan. Sometimes they hit the old crocodiles bang with a stone on the snout and the creatures swirled back savagely into the brown river. But the most marvellous thing about John—and, like Petrus, he was only five—was the way he handled clay. He could fashion birds, flamingoes and hornbills, storks, ducks. He could twist the clay into the shapes of little birds, too. He could shape trees, heads and faces, though not yet as well as he made birds. He could mix the clay for bricks with Oupa.

The walls of the house grew. New pieces of furniture made by Oupa were added. John wanted to be taught how to make furniture. His hands were never idle. His skin was like chocolate, and his eyes were a deep brown. His teeth shone white.

They still had their meals under the wide thorn tree. Bennie's tobacco was growing like cabbage plants. There was a crop of maize and a patch of Kaffir corn. There was a patch of pineapples and some small banana plants. Soon, he said, he'd be getting some avocado trees.

When the marula plums were ripe, and there were many marulas in the bush, he brewed beer from them, but he only allowed the children to drink it when it was fresh. Then it tasted like lemonade. He drank it when it was real beer, and then he'd be talking half the night, and often he found himself talking to himself, for the children would be fast asleep.

But his delight was much greater in the two old peach trees which had been planted by the emerald-digger. They still bore fruit, not good for eating, but they would make a marvellous peach brandy. Witblitz, it was called—"white lightning".

Then Zukkie came to live with them. Zukkie was a steenbuck whose mother had been killed by a pack of wild dogs, and the children had found it lost in the bush. John had caught it. It was all spindly legs and jerking ears, and big, soft brown eyes and sniffly little snorts. It was all of a soft fawn with a small black dot above the tip of the muzzle. Eyebrows and belly were white. Petrus and Sannie asked why the terrible dogs hadn't killed the baby, and Oupa explained that she must have been hiding when the mother bolted away. So she was an orphan.

Bennie was as delighted with her as the children were. "You

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know," he said, "this one is just right for a pet, one of the smallest and most beautiful of the bucks. She's a girl."

That was why, the boys decided later, the orphan made Sannie her favourite. They were soon following Zukkie like a dog. All three guarded her when they took her to the river for a drink. At night, she curled up with Sannie. They took her to places of sweet grass and soft leaves.

TIME fled in the sun until Bennie's tobacco leaves were now hanging in a little open thatched enclosure he had built. The leaves turned golden and filled the air with aroma. Bennie sniffed the long strands, fingered the leaves gently. Then the time came when he rolled the leaf into long, tight rolls, until they looked like tremendous cigars. They were drum tight. Soon he was sampling the tobacco in his calabash.

"From the first whiff," he told Sergeant Vorster, "I knew I had grown champion tobacco. Now with my calabash like a little chimney and the witblitz from my trees I wouldn't change places with the Prime Minister."

The sergeant was surprised when he saw John. Bennie told him what had happened.

"He's a great worker," said Bennie. "He even helps me to thatch. He's good." He told about the mamba. "That's where the little Kaffir is most useful. He looks after Petrus and Sannie. There's another thing. John is wonderful with his hands with the clay."

He showed the sergeant some of John's clay figures.

"They look good, but then most Kaffir kids make things out of clay, Oom."

The sergeant was much more impressed when he was introduced to Zukkie.

"She's certainly a treasure," he said. "And the children look fine, Oom."

"They're as fit as cheetahs, Sergeant."

"I only have to look at them to see that they're even as fit as lion cubs. It's the only life for the kinders. And you, you don't know what is happening in the country or in the world."

"I'm not interested."

"It must be wonderful never to see a newspaper."

"Ja. The only newspaper I'm interested in is the bush and the forest, the veld and the wide skies, and the old Olifants singing its long brown way to the sea. Elephants for my neighbours. They got drunk on the marula plums and the kinders and me

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watched them from the crotches of trees. We nearly laughed our heads off. I tell you, the baby elephants were dancing."

"The monkeys must have been drunk, too."

"Ja. We got a baby and took it home. You should have heard its mother swearing at us drunkenly. But she must have got sober and then she came here one night and the little monkey vanished. Its mother stole it back."

Once a month Bennie and Petrus and Sannie went to the dorp to get the money and John and Zukkie stayed at home. Always, Sergeant Vorster was saying when he dropped them two miles from home, "Ja, when I get time off I'm coming for that big shoot in your kingdom, Oom Bennie."

So was Uncle Jim promising to come when he and Bennie had the bottle of brandy between them. They made each meeting a celebration.

So life went singing in the golden land. Bennie brewed his white lightning and his tongue was as loose as an elephant's trunk. Now most of the house had been thatched. It was bone dry when the big rains came. He had put in a chimney and it was a bit crooked, but it took the smoke all right on the winter nights. It was by the wood fire that he told them about his exploits in the war.

They never tired of the story about the bugle. They all loved that bugle, the only souvenir he had brought back from the war. When they wandered too far and they had to find their way through unfamiliar country he would blow the bugle, and invariably John would pick up the trail towards it. Bennie had once scattered a pride of lions with a blast from the bugle. Zukkie bolted into the bush when she first heard it. But now when it sounded she would cock her ears and know where the sound came from, sometimes quicker than John.

Rubbing his hands over the shine of the bugle, Bennie would say, "That was the time, kinders, when I nearly broke my heart. For three days we had battled with the English, who were as many as locusts, and as always we were few. We hid behind rocks, fired and vanished. We knew the country. They blundered about. The sun burned them, but it only warmed us. We were on the koppies of our homeland, fighting for every inch of them.

"I'll never understand why we didn't drive them verdomde Engelsman from the Transvaal and all the way to the sea, for the times we beat them were without number. That three-day battle saw them on the run, big guns and all. We rode our horses into the valley where their dead and wounded lay and their

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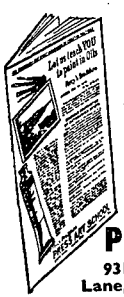

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wagons were abandoned. They had left some horses and there were some nice ones for the picking. I got a nice horse and I was riding away on my own horse and leading the other, when I thought to myself that I might as well look for another souvenir.

"I looked down to see a little drummer boy in his red coat. He lay dead with his bugle touching his cheek. He was so young, just a boy, and his face must have been as fresh as a girl's. I buried him there in the green valley and all I took was the bugle. I sold the horse soon after, but I knew I had the best bugle in the world. That's why I could never part with it. That's why I always keep it shining."

The children wept over the story.

Many times after the story had been told, Petrus would say, "He must have been a good bugler, Oupa."

"I should say he must have been the best in the world, Petrus. He kept it shining. I could have loved that boy."

"I would have liked him for a big brother," said Sannie.

And John made a model of the bugle with clay. He gave it to Sannie to keep for her very own. He was working on another model, the face of Bennie, with the beard and the old hat and the calabash hanging from the smiling lips. He destroyed model after model.

"Not good enough," he said, when they protested. "Some day I'll make a real one."

He had also begun to work on stone with a chisel. The birds and the animals were life-like. One day he'd chisel out the head of Sannie in stone, he promised. Or perhaps in wood, he said, if he ever got a good knife.

Bennie also got wine from milking the ilala palm, for all you had to do was to nick the palm at the top of the tall trunk and hang a bottle or a gourd under it. Then the sap would run in. Like the marula drink, it had the tang of lemonade when it was fresh. But Bennie only allowed the children a few sips. When it fermented it was a potent wine. Not as powerful as witblitz, said Bennie, but it was good. He called the sap the milk, and sometimes the tears, of the tree. He caught it in old brandy bottles, and sometimes in gourds which he made out of melons by scooping out the flesh.

The children found through John that much of the wild berry fruit was edible. There was a species of wild fig which they ate sparingly. They ate the ripe shakama plums which were red and fleshy. There were some acacia berries fit to eat. There were many trees which were gorgeous in blossom time.

Bennie made beams from the wild seringa tree, and axe and

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pick handles from the wild wisteria. Once when he told the children the story of the Garden of Eden, he said that it must have been very much like their home, for there was everything they needed in their wild garden. The avocados were growing sturdily and the first little fists of bananas. He had planted pawpaw trees.

He told people in the dorp that his tomatoes just jumped up. Now everybody in the dorp knew him. He told them he was the happiest man in the land. He was grinding his own maize and making beer out of Kaffir corn.

The house looked untidy from the outside and, squinting at it sometimes, he would laugh and say that he had built it like the hammerkop built its nest, which was a higgle-diggle-piggle muddle of grass and sticks or anything else the bird could lay its beak to. But the children wouldn't have that. It was a tidy house, they said, with nothing lopsided about it at all.

Bennie made them bows and arrows, fashioning the arrows on a stone under one of the umbrellas, as he called the thorn trees. Petrus and John sometimes brought down partridges with their arrows, but Sannie never used hers at all after she had seen the first bird killed.

Now they called the sergeant Oom Koobie, and the Olifants was their own river. One day they just escaped with their lives when they tried to catch a baby hippo which had become separated from its mother. It looked like a glistening rubber ball. They took to their heels and shinned up trees when old mother hippo came blundering and bellowing, looking for her baby.

"Never get into a tangle with any old hippo," Bennie warned them.

Uncle Jim came one day in a Jeep right up to the door, for the Jeep could crush its way through scrub and sand. Bennie and Jim went off hunting, and there was so much meat that they cut a great deal of it into strips and hung it up in the sun to make biltong. Sun-dried meat was wonderful, sustaining and sweet to the taste. Bennie had lived on it in the war.

Uncle Jim had brought a couple of bottles of brandy and then they talked like parrots. The children heard about Ladysmith, Colenso and Mafeking. Bennie told the story of the bugle and even Uncle Jim wept. Late in the night Bennie let off blasts on the bugle and even the owls were scared.

There was nothing of the hammerkop about the house, said Uncle Jim. It was a masterpiece, considering that Bennie had found everything for its making, except nails, in the bush. He marvelled at the bunks Bennie had made for the children; at the

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beautiful karosses. He began to cry for his lost childhood and said that if he could bring it back he would live it out with the children in Bennie's Garden of Eden.

"Bennie," he said, "if I find any stray children I'm going to send them straight here to you."

"Ja, they will be welcome," said Bennie. "I could put on wings to my hammerkop house, man."

Uncle Jim told the children the story of the Pied Piper, between swigs from the bottle and purrs from his cheroot. "Listen, kinders," he said, "there was a dorp once full of rats and a bloke who called himself the Pied Piper comes along and says to the dorp council he'd be getting rid of all them rats if they paid him a hundred pounds. He had a flute, see, and he played it champion. He played that flute and all them rats come tumbling out. All colours they was, all sizes. And he piped them into the river, just like the Olifants over there. And all the rats got drowned.

"Then the Piper goes to the dorp council and asks for his money. The skelms offer him only a little. He's so angry then, boiling. Out he goes into the street and he blows his pipe, and all the kinders come running after him. And he pipes them all into a cave and the cave closes behind them, and all them kinders are gone excepting one lame boy who couldn't walk fast enough."

"It's a sad story," said Bennie.

"And yours is, about that there bugle," said Uncle Jim. "You blow that bugle and I'm sure that other children will come to you."

IT was Uncle Jim who brought the first child. He came roaring in one day in the Jeep with a little girl beside him. She was an orphan, he said, a Van der Merwe, some connection with some of his late wife's family. Elsie van der Merwe, a brown-eyed, brown-haired girl of the same age as Sannie. She took to the life like a little buck to the bush. She was wide-eyed for weeks when she went to the bush with the children. She cried just as easily when Bennie told the story of the bugle.

It was after that that the children came tumbling in. Bennie soon lost count of when they came. They came in an avalanche, from anybody who wanted to save a child from going to an orphanage. Oom Koobie, the policeman, found an orphan, Hendrick, who was called Hennie. The magistrate brought the boy, Gert. The bugle called until there were Paul and Hannie, Margretta, Willie, Joshua, Albertina, Catrina. Twelve white children and John. Bennie was Oom Bennie to them all.

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There were times when Bennie had to rub his eyes to get himself to believe that all the children now belonged to him. He mixed up their names so often that the bush shook with laughter. He marshalled them, drilled them, allotted labour to them, took them on expeditions and taught them all he knew about the wonderland. They never tired of the bugle story. The bugle called them back from their playing and their hunting.

Some were tall, some were thin, but they were soon all as brown as the wild dates in the hearts of the palms. They wore bright feathers in their hair. They were tow-haired, dark, fair, and Joshua had flaming red hair. Hennie was the smallest and he had deep, blue eyes. He was often on Oom Bennie's knees.

Uncle Jim called in the Jeep with bags of sweets, and he took Oom Bennie back with him to the dorp to sign a sheaf of papers to get allowances for the children from the government.

The magistrate laughed and said, "When this list gets to Pretoria it'll be like an earthquake in the Union Buildings. I wouldn't be surprised if they don't send an official down to see what it's all about. But you'll be warned, Oom."

No sooner had the list got to Pretoria than a clerk gasped, "Somebody's gone crazy and it isn't me." He took the sheaf to his chief, Meneer Adolf Brink, who wore striped trousers.

Meneer Brink rang for Meneer Johannes Coetzee, his deputy, a little man, natty in a dark suit and wearing horn-rimmed glasses. Meneer Coetzee looked, read, gasped.

He was told to telephone Tzaneen to get a full report from the magistrate, Frans Schoeman. It took him hours. He was in a maze when he heard that Oom Bennie Becker, oudstryder, had gone into the bush with his two orphaned grandchildren, how he had built a house and made a garden, and had even got a little black boy for a servant. How this Oom Bennie had a bugle, a souvenir from the Boer War, and he blew the bugle like the Pied Piper had played his flute, and the orphaned children heard it and they went to Oom Bennie's Garden of Eden.

He was told that there was something remarkable about the little Kaffir, John, who was quite an artist with his hands and had a gallery of clay, wood and stone figures. He had made a very striking wood-carving of the face of Oom Bennie and had carved out of stone the faces of some of the children; and so many animals.

That was all irrelevant, Meneer Coetzee told Frans Schoeman. What he was after was to find out how this Bennie Becker had got the right to be bringing up the orphans. Schoeman got huffy.

"Do you insinuate that I have condoned the breaking of the

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law?" he challenged. "You go and tell your chief, Meneer Brink, to come down himself and to see for himself if the children are neglected, whether Oom Bennie is a fit and proper guardian."

Meneer Coetzee reported back to his chief and Adolf Brink's heavy jaw slackened with a slow smile. He said, "We'll both go down. We'll soon settle this matter. The lowveld is glorious at this time of the year. Tomorrow morning, then."

"We can't go tomorrow, meneer. We have a conference."

"Oh, yes, I forgot. Next day then. We'll take our guns. There's good shooting down that way. Tell that landdrost of Tzaneen we are coming."

Then Frans Schoeman rang Sergeant Vorster at Olifantsdorp and he went to Uncle Jim and they came roaring into the Garden of Eden late in the afternoon. While the children clambered all over the Jeep, Bennie and Jim and the sergeant went into a huddle.

The Jeep roared away like a chariot into the sunset. Oom Bennie and the children had supper, and then he ringed them round the fire in the open and said, "Tomorrow, you're going to have the wash of your lives in the river."

What about the crocodiles? the children asked.

"I'll be on the bank with my gun. The government is coming down to see you day after tomorrow. You've got to be so clean that the government will blink its eyes. Of course, if any child is unhappy, he can go away with the government."

The children went glum.

"Well, everybody who wants to stay put up your hands."

All hands shot up.

He blew them out of bed with his bugle in the morning. After breakfast he marched them down to the river. It ran like a song. There wasn't a sign of a crocodile. So he chose a shallow place. They bathed and used lashings of soap. They shone like little hippos.

"We'll be back again tomorrow before the government comes," he said.

Next morning he had to take a shot at an old crocodile, but they all scrambled out in time; and they were all dripping with silver water and as their bodies dried they got toasted by the sun. Bennie spent almost all day cutting the boys' hair, and the girls combed and combed their hair until it shone. They all went to bed early.

Over breakfast, Bennie gave them final instructions. "You'll go behind the thorn trees when you hear the government come

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roaring in. When you hear the bugle you'll come out and get into line, a straight line facing the government."

"Will they be men?" asked Catrina, tossing her wings of black hair.

"Of course," said Oom Bennie.

"How many?" asked Petrus.

"I wouldn't know that, but I should say this is an important occasion. Now as you draw up that line, Petrus, you'll look down the length of it and motion it straight if it's crooked, and when I blow the bugle for the salute, you'll salute."

They rehearsed. He made them do it several times until it was perfect.

They went into the bush and watched distant tracks. There was nothing but the rasping of the cicadas in the drowse of the day. Hours went by before John and then Zukkie cocked their ears at the sound of a car. They scampered back to the house and vanished into the thorn trees. They heard the whine of the car coming through the sand. They heard the car grind to a halt.

Hennie peeped round a tree and announced, "It's a big car with GG on it. Bennie is smiling at two men, and stroking his beard. The front of the car's had a bashing. Must have bashed a tree. Oh, and Oom Koobie, the policeman, is with them. Must have shown them the way."

"Without Oom Koobie they would have been lost," said Petrus.

They could hear the men laughing. Then came the blast of the bugle which shook them to their toes. They marched out in line and they turned, shuffled into a straight line. The bugle gave another blast and all the small hands swept up to foreheads in a salute. Then Oom Bennie said, "Children, this is the government, Meneer Brink and Meneer Coetzee."

The children bowed as one child. The government smiled at the children, who took the government by the hand and led them round and after a lot of coaxing got Zukkie to come to them. After a time she allowed the government to stroke her.

One of the men said, "I'm Oom Adolf," and nodding towards the little man, he said, "and this is Oom Johannes."

The children smiled as one child.

"I believe you are happy here," said Oom Adolf.

"As happy as lion cubs, meneer," said Petrus.

"We understand you don't want to live in a dorp."

The children hung their heads.

"Would you mind if we stayed two days?"

"We would be delighted," said Sannie.

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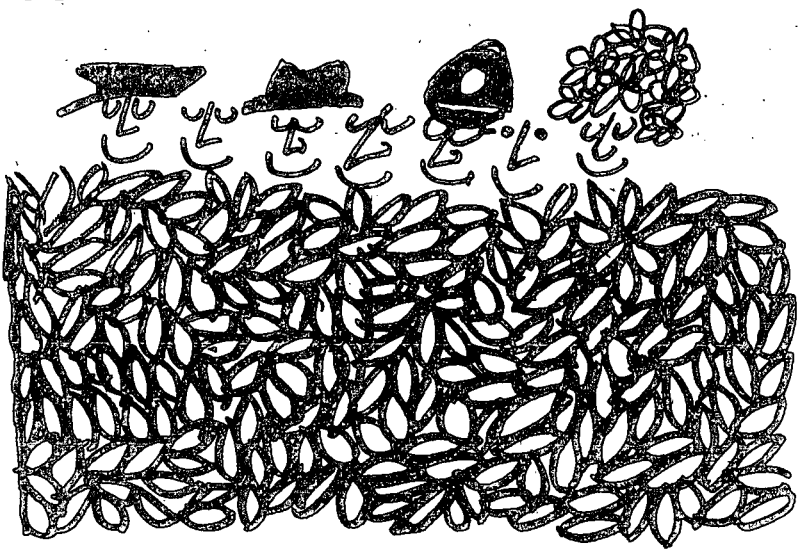

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"We'll take you hunting," said Hennie, for he had spotted the guns in the car. "And tonight we can sit round the fire and Oom Bennie will tell you some of the stories about the war. About all the Engelsman he shot."

"And about that bugle," said Paul. "You'll cry when he tells that story."

The government and Oom Bennie had a bottle of brandy and as they sat drinking, the children examined the car. It was a Land Rover. It announced itself as such.

"A Land Rover can climb a mountain," said Petrus.

"It laughs at sandhills," said Oom Koobie.

The children gave the government biltong. They took them to the gallery of John's work. Oom Adolf said he was really surprised. He said that the head of Oom Bennie was true to life. He admired most a wooden model of Zukkie which John had carved out of olive wood. John gave it to him as a gift.

"If the little Kaffir had real tools, like a sharp knife with many blades, for instance, he'd do better work still," said Oom Bennie.

Oom Adolf said that when he got back to Pretoria he'd get John a kit of tools, including a magnificent knife. John was so grateful that he said he would make a head of Oom Adolf out of clay and when he got the tools he would later copy it in wood. There would be plenty of time, for the government was going to stay two days. They had brought fleecy sleeping bags and they would sleep in them under the trees.

The children waited on the men at the big meal. There was fruit and tomatoes from the garden, venison, sweet potatoes, melons, pineapples, the first of the banana crop. Afterwards Oom Bennie packed Oom Adolf's pipe with his tobacco, but Oom Adolf nearly choked over the smoke and returned to his own pouch. Oom Johannes smoked an occasional cigarette. Bennie's calabash belched smoke.

But Oom Bennie looked as if he wanted to hide when the children, round the fire, egged him to tell the story of the bugle. He told it and the government looked terribly sad. And the tales! That one in which Oom Bennie scattered a whole battalion of Engelsman by putting oxen into a stampede.

"And after Oom Bennie had taken many prisoners he had some of the oxen killed and they had a grand braaivleis," said Petrus.

"Many of the Engelsman liked the meat so much that they told Oom Bennie that when the war was over, they wouldn't go back to the cold climate of England," said little Hennie.

Yes, Oom Bennie fought under General Botha, Smuts, Cronje,

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de Wet. The stories he told were in no book but all in his head. Some of the children told some of the stories because Oom Bennie didn't want to tell them. He was at the siege of Kimberley (where Uncle Jim once had to eat horse meat). He had been at Ladysmith and Mafeking. All three sieges. He had come within an ace of capturing Winston Churchill. That time when his own horse was shot dead under him he shot an officer dead. He took the officer's horse and it was the fastest horse in the war.

Twice he saved General de Wet's life and the General himself gave him a medal, but years later Oom Bennie lost it in his travels. Oom Bennie was one of the ten best shots in the war. There was another time when he held a farmhouse alone against fifty men. He fired so fast and furiously that the Engelsman thought the house was full of Boers.

Oom Bennie looked so modest as the children talked. The government laughed and laughed. They went to sleep in the fleecy bags with their guns beside them. They didn't know until the morning that the boys had taken turn to be on guard, in case lions or elephants called.

IN the morning there was the hunt. Uncle Jim had come before dawn in his Jeep. Late in the morning Oom Bennie shot an impala, and Uncle Jim, who was a butcher as well as storekeeper and postmaster, cut up the meat and they had it roasted on a wood fire. It had just a little of the wood smoke in it. Back at the house, the government told the children that they could stay in their beautiful wild garden under the care of their wonderful guardian, Oom Bennie. They were to be fitted out with clothes in Uncle Jim's store. It was the least that could be done for a man who had become their father and mother rolled into one.

The children cheered. The government went off with a kudu carcase all nicely cut up by Uncle Jim. The children ran after the GG car down the track and waved it on its way. They had always loved Oom Bennie, but from then on he was more than special, for he was a real bugler of miracles. What a day that was in the dorp when he marshalled them in front of the store and they were fitted with clothes and shoes. But they only wore them on Sundays, and after the Bible reading they went back into their veldskoen and moochis.

There was the sad time when Zukkie went off into the bush one night and didn't come back. Oom Bennie told them that Zukkie had gone to find a mate. Weeks later they saw her running with the horned bushbuck. Then she vanished for months,

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until one day they found her near the house with a lamb at her heels, and they called the lamb Baby.

There was the alarm when Margretta got bitten by a cobra and she would have died had not John sucked the poison from her leg and Oom Bennie treated her with snake serum. In just over a week she was tomboying around again.

John got his kit of tools with the many-bladed knife. He made the head of Oom Adolf and it was sent to Pretoria. Oom Bennie got a letter to say that it took pride of place in Oom Adolf's home.

The children played and hunted. They bathed in the river and didn't give a fig for any fear of the crocodiles. They listened to the tales of Oom Bennie, and there were always new ones, until they wondered why he hadn't become a general, like Botha or de Wet or Smuts. They got to like the stories about de Wet most of all, for there was magic in the speed of his horse, and he routed whole armies with a handful of men, and Oom Bennie at most times was his right-hand man.

There was that time when it looked like the end of the world when Oom Bennie's calabash got broken and was useless. The time when it had sprung a hole he had patched it with resin from the trees. When the stem had cracked he had used a vulture's quill in it. But now it was finished. He rolled the tobacco into big, clumsy cigars, sometimes in fat cigarettes in old newspaper, and sometimes in dried banana leaves, but he looked lost.

Then in the middle of one night Petrus and John trekked to the dorp and they were there when Uncle Jim opened his store at seven o'clock in the morning. They told him about the catastrophe. But he hadn't a calabash. He drove them to Tzaneen. There was no calabash. They went all the way to Pietersburg, where they found one. When they got back to the dorp it was too late to go home, and so they had to spend the night with Uncle Jim, who would take them and the pipe back in the morning.

Oom Bennie and the children hadn't slept at all. They scoured the river. They scattered through the bush. Oom Bennie's bugle called and called, but there was no answer. None of the children knew of the plan of Petrus and John, who knew that if they had told the others all the children would have wanted to go with them. And without any of them around Oom Bennie would have gone off his head.

"You see, Uncle Jim, we wanted it to be a surprise for Oom Bennie," said Petrus, licking jam from a fat bun.

"Of course, I understand," said Uncle Jim. "How he loves a

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calabash! But who is going to pay for it? Pay me, I mean. You know it cost ten shillings."

The boys' faces fell. They had no money.

All the creases in Uncle Jim's face danced as he laughed. "We'll send the bill to the government." They laughed with him until the tears ran down their cheeks. They heard Uncle Jim later laughing in bed.

But in the bush, Oom Bennie had a face as long as the Olifants'. The children all looked sick. Oom Bennie was drinking his white lightning. Had a crocodile taken the boys? Had a lion? But if those boys turned up he'd tan them. He clenched his fists and his mouth and he said, "If the little devils don't come home tomorrow I'm going to call on the government to find them." Then his face went all soft. "They were such fine boys," he said.

Sannie burst into sobs and threw herself in his arms. Then all the children were crying and they were all over him. He hugged them. Then he reassured them: "They're too clever to get lost."

"But, Oom," said little Joshua, and you could see where the tears had snailed his nose, "don't you think we should pray?"

They all went on their knees in the dust and Oom Bennie prayed: "God of all little children, please send Petrus and John back to us safe and sound." The children said, "Amen."

They tossed in their bunks with no sleep in them. They listened to the sounds of the night. They heard the roar of lions and they trembled. They heard a leopard cough near the house. It was the longest night of their lives.

They were up before dawn, peering into the darkness. Oom Bennie blew the bugle. Nobody wanted any breakfast, although there were fresh maize cobs on the menu. But soon they were tearing through the bushes to the sound of a car and they knew it was the Jeep with Uncle Jim at the wheel before it reached the house in a cloud of dust. There was Petrus brandishing the new calabash, and Oom Bennie weeping; laughing when Uncle Jim told him of the trek they had had to find the pipe; laughing his head off when Uncle Jim said they'd send the bill for it to the government.

What a calabash! It was like a little bucket. It was never without smoke except when Oom Bennie was eating, drinking, or sleeping.

IT must have been two years, but nobody could be sure of the time in the land where time didn't count. Then it looked as if they were going to run into trouble. It had always seemed to be far off, with the garden flourishing, even to the first avocado

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pears. The children scooped out the flesh and the skins were like little canoes which they set on the river for a race and they ran down the banks urging their craft on.

A dominee appeared one day. Oom Bennie saw at a glance that he was a man of the kerk in his black clothes and white tie. He was covered with dust as he had had to leave his car and had got lost on the way.

There was a rent in his trousers and a big scratch on his knee from a thorn bush.

The children hadn't been in the river for many days. They were half-naked and they looked as if they never washed.

"They are like a lot of pagans," said the dominee, who had introduced himself as the Reverend Cornelius de Kock.

"I beg your pardon, Dominee," said Oom Bennie, through a cloud of smoke. "On Sunday they're all dressed up and I read them Bible stories. How can they go to the kerk ten miles away? You can't expect them to trek that far, can you?" That was a challenge, thought the children.

"And ten miles back," Oom Bennie added, and fixed him with a cold eye.

"I admit it's a long way, Meneer Becker."

"You know, Dominee, you can come along any time and teach them all you want to. They'll be here as clean as new needles any time you'll say you're calling."

The dominee looked as if he had been caught in a trap. "You know I can't do that," he said. "I've got my kerk and my congregation, but you just can't bring up these children like infidels, like Kaffirs. Where on earth did you get them?"

"Orphans and children nobody wanted, Dominee," said Bennie, who had no sooner knocked the ashes out of his pipe than he was bashing it full again. "All their names are with the government. I'm their legal guardian."

"Ja, I understand that," said the man in black, his hand trying to hide the rent in his trousers. "But I'll soon see if they know anything about the Holy Scriptures."

"Fire away, Dominee," said Bennie.

The dominee asked them about Job, Daniel and Samson. The answers came pat.

They told him how the walls of Jericho fell to the sound of a trumpet, and Sannie said, "It must have been something like Oom Bennie's bugle."

The children laughed and Oom Bennie chuckled.

But what did they know about the Lord? They let him have the Birth in the stable, the flight into Egypt, and the terrible

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King Herod. Then the childhood of Jesus; on to the time when he whipped the money-changers out of the temple; and to the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.

"It is as Oom Bennie says," said Elsie, the pert one who took to Scripture like a sponge. "This is the Garden of Eden where the Lord has given us everything we need—meat and mealies, wood for our furniture, palm leaves and rushes for thatching."

"And tobacco for Oom Bennie's calabash," said little Hennie.

They leaped into every opening the dominee gave them until he said, "Indeed, you do teach them the Book. Yes indeed. One day I'll have to come again to confirm them."

"Let me know," said Bennie, waving his pipe, "and I'll have them all dressed up when you call again."

John and Petrus went with the dominee to find his car or he might have got lost again, and when he parted from them he said to Petrus, "That Oom of yours is a remarkable man."

Bennie was glad that the dominee wasn't eavesdropping when for weeks the children mimicked him, the boys in turn taking his part with tight lips and frowning eyes.

Again there was peace in the garden and the calabash was a chimney. Bennie often talked to it, saying, "To think what Petrus and John did for me that time. Truly I'm blessed in my children."

They had to have medicines sometimes. Uncle Jim supplied them and sent the bills to the government. There were many letters which Oom Bennie ignored. There were ultimatums which said he'd have to be more careful with the bills. Albertina had to have spectacles and there was a long argument by letter about the bill.

Everything was trifling compared to the battle with the school inspector. Like the dominee he had stormed into their peace one day, and even though they had come from bathing in the river, and they looked and smelled like new washing, the inspector, Meneer Pieter van der Oosthuisen, a bald-headed, pale gangle of a man, wasn't impressed. He was a chain cigarette smoker and spoke with the cigarette dancing in his mouth, as he switched it round with his tongue.

It was no use Oom Bennie saying that although they didn't know their multiplication tables they knew a lot about wild game and they could scare crocodiles. That, said the cigarette, wasn't education. Some of the girls could sew and the boys could tan a skin, but that wasn't writing. It was unthinkable, said the inspector, to find a mob of children who couldn't write or read.

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Any way you look at it, there's something special in Springtime reading in next month's Argosy

BOTHERATION AT BLANDINGS CASTLE. The *other* world of P. G. Wodehouse—that of Blandings Castle and Lord Emsworth, subject of a new TV series—is the setting of a story from the pen of the old Master of Comedy.

TREACHERY IN THE ALPS. Winston Graham, in top form, tells of the encounter between an English traveller and a Hungarian refugee with a terrible secret.

ANYONE CAN SHOOT A LION. That's the title of David Coleman's *African story of how a man learns that he just* can't destroy everything that's wild and free.

A MERRY MIX-UP OF MATCH-MAKING. Harry Sutton, an author new to Argosy, tells the hilarious tale of two love-lorn airmen and an unpredictable widow at a peace-time RAF station.

PLUS: Michael Gilbert turns the spotlight on Mr. Calder in Part Two of Agents in Action . . . John Salt's newest story concerns the private life of a cat burglar . . . From another Argosy favourite, Willard Marsh, comes a fable for Easter.

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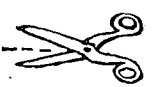

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They could sing some of the old songs, but that again wasn't education. What of their future? Without education they would be useless in the world.

They would be handicapped all their lives, these poor illiterate children.

They tried to cajole him to go hunting. He said he hadn't ever fired a gun.

"How will you get them to school then?" asked Oom with a jerk of his pipe.

"I'll get them to school," said the inspector, "if they have to go on donkeys."

The children joined Oom Bennie in a burst of laughter. The inspector glared at them.

"The lions would eat the donkeys," said Oom Bennie. "Maybe the lions would eat the kinders too. Would you answer for that, meneer?"

"I'll get them to school," he said in a parting shot.

When he had gone Oom Bennie soothed them. They must leave it all to him.

Over the bottle he had long huddles with Uncle Jim. They decided to appeal to Oom Adolf Brink in Pretoria. But he replied that the problem had nothing to do with his department but with the Department of Education.

ONE day Uncle Jim told Oom Bennie that he knew a way of fixing the government. Bennie knew that Jim had been talking a lot with the magistrate, Frans Schoeman, when he came over from Tzaneen.

"You know, Bennie," said Uncle Jim, "the government has to provide transport for children who have a long way to go to school. It's simple. You dig in your heels and they'll have to provide transport, see. It's terrific, man."

They mulled over letters to Pretoria. Bennie blew the bugle when there was no need to. He began to strut. His calabash was on fire. Letters came and letters went. Perhaps, said one letter from Pretoria, some of the children could be boarded near the school.

Oom Bennie replied that the children wouldn't be parted. In any case, the government would have to provide transport to bring the children back home on Friday night and take them back again on the Monday. The reply was that there was no reason why the children should go home for weekends. The children were in open revolt. They could bolt into the bush whenever

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there was any danger that they would be taken away from their home.

Somehow there would have to be a great challenge. The children would have to get school clothes, new shoes. The bill at Jim's store was colossal. Nearly a hundred pounds. Uncle Jim threw in a few bags of tobacco to make it the round hundred, and charged it to the toothpaste and soap items. Oom Bennie often liked a little manufactured tobacco to mix with his home-grown. He took a telegram form in Jim's store and wrote: FITTED OUT CHILDREN WITH SCHOOL CLOTHES STOP £100 BILL ON WAY.

A telegram came back from Pretoria: REFUSE SUCH EXTRAVAGANT EXPENDITURE.

Oom Bennie wrote another telegram: IGNORING YOUR TELEGRAM STOP DEMAND SCHOOL TRANSPORT AND NEW BUSH ROAD OR BRING ALL TWELVE CHILDREN AND LEAVE THEM YOUR OFFICE IN PRETORIA STOP GIVE YOU THREE DAYS TO DECIDE.

"That'll fix 'em proper," said Uncle Jim. "Now you sign it 'Oudstryder Bennie Becker'."

"Ja," said Bennie, "better to remind them how I helped to save my country."

When the telegram reached Pretoria the telephones in the Union buildings went mad. The Education Department told the Welfare Department that it had spoonfed Bennie Becker so much that he was now crazy with power. Welfare told Education that they didn't have a leg to stand on and that Meneer Becker was within his rights in demanding the road and the bus. Didn't they know who they were dealing with? Didn't they know that he had twice saved General de Wet's life? That he had fought the war with handfuls of maize and biltong? If he marched up Church Street, Pretoria, with the children of the veld behind him, he would cause a sensation. The Prime Minister was at home in Libertas and they wouldn't put it beyond Bennie to deposit the children on the shaved lawns.

Welfare warned Education about the newspapers. Did they want publicity?

Oom Bennie and the children were round the fire one night when the Jeep roared in. Uncle Jim was waving a telegram and bawling, "We've beaten the government."

Bennie took a flaming stick from the fire and in the light of it he read aloud: KEEP CHILDREN STOP REQUESTS GRANTED STOP ROAD WILL BE MADE AND SCHOOL BUS PROVIDED.

The children capitulated when they were told by Uncle Jim the full measure of Oom Bennie's victory.

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"But Uncle Jim too," said Oom Bennie. "We worked together."

"You two are wonderful," said Sannie.

Oom Bennie shrugged. "Me and Uncle Jim fought a war and we both won it. What could the government do against us?"

Long after they had gone to bed the children heard the old men refighting the war. Now they were in Ladysmith and Colenso. Their laughter filled the children's dreams.

Some days later a letter came for Oom Bennie from Oom Adolf in Pretoria, saying that he was glad all his differences with the government had been settled. He had been thinking about little John with the gift in his hands. He said that a well-known sculptor in Pretoria was interested in him and that arrangements would be made for John to come to Pretoria to be taught by the sculptor.

Oom Adolf sent his love to the children; and he said that some day he'd be down again with his gun for a little hunting.

The children wandered the bush and argued where the road would be made. The bugle called them. Oom Bennie said that he would give a blast on the bugle when the bus took them to school and welcome them with a *ra-ta-ta-ta* when they came home in the afternoon.

The children took turns in shining the bugle. You could see your face in it.

Uncle Jim came with a new calabash, saying, "A man like you, Bennie, shouldn't have only one pipe. Remember how you was like a lion with a sore head when the old one broke. Now you can take a turnabout with them calabashes."

My calabashes of dreams, thought Bennie. My bugle of dreams, thought Bennie.

"It's good to live to be old and to see your dreams come true," he said to Uncle Jim.

© Tom Macdonald 19 6

Tom Macdonald, Welsh-speaking and born in Wales, though of Irish parents, has just returned to his native region; a village near Aberystwyth, where he was once a student at the University. He has been a journalist in Britain, China, Australia and, for over twenty-five years, in South Africa. Of nine books which he has had published, six are novels, mainly with Welsh settings; while three are non-fiction works with South African themes. In South Africa Tom Macdonald has been a columnist and news editor, and has edited a magazine. He is now engaged in full-time writing.

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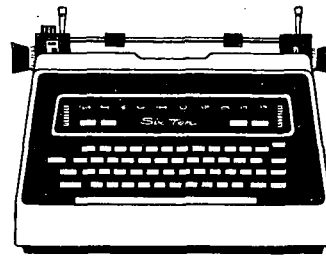
A professional in his prime



New Books by John Pudney

SIR Compton Mackenzie persists in contributing to the joys of life with his *Octaves*. These are his account of eighty years of life, written in instalments each covering eight years in time. *Octave VI*, the latest addition to this impressive autobiographical structure, appropriately entitled *My Life and Times* (Chatto and Windus, 35s.), is concerned with 1923–1930, when Mackenzie was in his forties.

I was going to refer to this as a period when he was in his prime; but I find this is a man whose prime is impossible to pinpoint. Meeting him now in his eighty-third year, full of mature wisdom and benevolent inquisitiveness, one is astonished that he still radiates a zest for life which is the envy of men half a century his junior. It is a zest for people, places, events, occasions, literature, music, horticulture . . . the list runs out of control. It is a very big zest and I love it, not only for its amplitude but for its generosity.

Among the younger writers—and there are many—who have sat at the feet of this great man, listening perhaps to the most scintillating literary conversation of these times, I have never heard him aim an unkind remark at a contemporary. This is not to say that Compton Mackenzie is indiscriminate in his benevolence or in any sense neutral in his opinions. There is fire and challenge in everything he expresses, and it is second nature to him to be involved in campaigns. What is so refreshing is his capacity for avoiding malice.

That this quality can also resolve itself into a neat backhander of understatement is nicely demonstrated in the present volume. In 1928, Mackenzie's forty-fifth year, D. H. Lawrence was pursuing his particularly repellent knack of portraying personal

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friends, acquaintances, benefactors and enemies in his works of fiction. That his short stories and novels of the period are of outstanding literary merit goes without question; but a number of the victims of his life-portraits which contributed to this success were grieved and damaged. It was evident enough to the literary world that Compton Mackenzie, who had a renowned passion for islands, was involved in Lawrence's story entitled *The Man Who Loved Islands*. Mackenzie did not give vent to spectacular fury, but he did remonstrate with the publishers; and his present recollection of the affair is typical of his attitude, which was concerned as much with botanical inaccuracy as with personal outrage.

" 'But it's not meant to be Monty,' Lawrence moaned. I replied that I was well aware of that but that if Lawrence used my background of a Channel Island and an island in the Hebrides for one of his preposterous Lawrentian figures, the public would suppose that it was a portrait. In any case Lawrence needed a lesson in botany. He had written too beautifully about flowers to be easily forgiven for covering a granite island in the Channel with cowslips; he should know that cowslips favour lime."

Octave VI is sprinkled with comment of that quality, not by any means confined to literary matters. Compton Mackenzie has elsewhere proclaimed that the secret of a happy life lies in "a perpetual sense of having such a lot to do". This is certainly the secret of his stimulus as an individual. There is never the slightest chance of his being boring. Yet owing to its very diversity, this is a book for cut-and-come-again reading. Everything has gone into the pot, old letters and press cuttings, some of them trivial; old controversies and campaigns which have slightly lost their context; and so on.

In spite of the many roles he has played, Compton Mackenzie seems to me, above all, to offer the image of the true professional, a wholly involved writer. It is an image, perhaps, which is passing and it is for that reason especially that this well-documented stirring of the pot of memory is so valuable.

The idea of a sort of ivory-tower writer, an artist cut off from the mainstream of life, engaging solely in the production of book after book of exquisite prose or verse, somehow never dies. When I was a publisher, aspiring authors were frequently floated into my ambit voicing the ambition to become full-time operators, identified completely with the literary life to the exclusion of everything else. Not only contemporary authorship but also history is against such aspirations. Compton Mackenzie has found, and still finds, time to participate in many unliterary

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aspects of life, while remaining a professional author with a prodigious output.

☐ **A FLEET STREET STORY.** Robert Harling's new novel, *The Hollow Sunday* (Chatto and Windus, 25s.), is a happy instance of versatility in a more recent generation. It is his fifth novel, a polished, mature tale which in fact has professionalism as its basic theme—the hard-baked professionalism of top journalism, overlapping high politics and personality television.

Apart from his novels Harling has written non-fiction books about World War II and specialised aspects of art. In daily life he has two somewhat exacting jobs. For most of the week he is a glossy magazine editor: toward the end of the week he is typographical adviser to the *Sunday Times*, for which he is also architectural correspondent.

The novels are a product of what he terms his leisure. Nevertheless, such a work as *The Hollow Sunday* betrays no sign of haste or dilettantism. It is an expert job, developing an unfailingly entertaining story in settings which are unfailingly sophisticated and, to most of us, inaccessible.

It is one of those stories in which nobody makes any effort at all to be nice, but nobody manages to be actually repulsive. The villain, an Oxford professor with a lust for power and a strong appetite for sex, who is fulfilling one of his ambitions by becoming a Minister of the Crown, is, for all his sins, very nearly likeable. The man who tells the story in the first person, Paul Mortimer, a very top feature writer who must be presumed to be the hero, is at once cynical, conscience-ridden and self-indulgent, all of which makes him come alive all right, but which fails to elicit much warmth of sympathy in the reader. The other main characters are the editors and proprietor of a newspaper, a rather hopeless Oxford don who is, nevertheless, a successful TV personality, and a couple of wives who are important to the story but who don't cut much ice except as foils to the men.

With the exception of the woolly Oxford character, who surprisingly but quite credibly is offered a life peerage, the men are built to Ian Fleming specifications, but they are intellectual rather than physical men of action. They eat and drink and lust with purpose and discrimination, and the narrator likes his details in this connection. Whether they are true to life in all this, few but the initiated can tell; but unquestionably they ring true as characters. Indeed they come together to build up a number of situations which are wholly credible and realistic.

The story-line itself begins with Paul Mortimer being not so

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much persuaded as "bribed" to become one of the high-class team of specialist journalists assembled to found a new national Sunday newspaper, the proprietor of which is an outsize and, needless to add, unlikeable tycoon. The routine and the drama associated with the birth of this prodigiously successful Sunday is told with panache and with intriguing cross-references to current Fleet Street affairs. No sooner is the newspaper established than the team in general, and Paul Mortimer in particular, are involved in a scandalous issue concerned with the translation of the professor from Oxford to Whitehall. Will this scandal wreck the professor? Will it destroy the newspaper? Will it permanently damage the rather cynical conscience of Mr. Mortimer?

It is not for me to reveal any of the solutions. Rather I would like to express a personal conversion. Having known Fleet Street pretty well in the past, though not admittedly on this high level, I have always been prejudiced against books about it, particularly those dramatising the profession. They have always seemed to me to be of parochial interest. *The Hollow Sunday*, however, converts me. It is possible after all, it seems, to write about it with gusto and credibility and give those who have never taken a walk down Fleet Street a glimpse of the inside story which is also a good yarn.

☐ **PROPHETIC PUPPETS?** I confess that I have rather lost touch with the literary progress of Colin Wilson since the days, which seem only yesterday, when he was widely proclaimed the *enfant terrible* of the business. It never seemed to me to be his fault that he was headlined in this way. It was simply that he was very young, healthily brash and knew too much for most people's liking. When I met him, he seemed modest enough, agreeably serious with a sense of humour, and as professional in his attitude to writing as subsequent work bears out.

That this first impact was not, in fact, that of yesterday, I now realise, for Wilson produced eight works of non-fiction including *An Encyclopedia of Murder*, a volume of autobiography and six novels. The *enfant terrible* image certainly belongs to the past, though the rather dauntingly effortless erudition manifests itself in his latest novel *The Mind Parasites* (Arthur Barker, 21s.).

This is a tough but rewarding read. I have a suspicion that some of the erudition, some of the intellectual garnish, is a bit facile. The feeling, if you like, that everything has gone into the pot rather in the manner of Compton Mackenzie already mentioned, but that these are the skimmings and trimmings of the mind rather than those of personal experience. But that said, I

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declare myself to be a willing victim of the contemporary Colin Wilson grind, strenuous though it may be.

The Mind Parasites is rewarding in fact because it is demanding. It is a novel of ideas, and those ideas are fantastic but challenging. Like the earlier fantasies of H. G. Wells they carry on where ascertained knowledge leaves off. Like some of the Wells notions they may well be prophetic. Again like Wells, the characters who are the vehicles for these ideas are not sufficiently well drawn to be memorable. This is a novel of situation in which the characters are used like guinea pigs in an experiment.

The main thought, contained in the title, is simple, and it is stated over and over again with variations. The most succinct quotation I cull from page 66: "In the history of art and literature since 1780, we see the results of the battle with the mind vampires. The artists who refused to preach a gospel of pessimism and life devaluation were destroyed. The life-slanderers often lived to a ripe old age. It is interesting for example to contrast the fate of the life-slanderer Schopenhauer with that of the life-affirmer Nietzsche, or that of the sexual degenerate De Sade with that of the sexual mystic Lawrence.

"Apart from these obvious facts, I have not succeeded in learning a great deal about the mind vampires. I am inclined to suspect that, in small numbers, they have always been present on earth. Possibly the Christian idea of the devil arises from some obscure intuition of the part they had played in human history: how their role is to take over a man's mind, and to cause him to become an enemy of life and of the human race. But it would be a mistake to blame the vampires for all the misfortunes of the human race. Man is an animal who is trying to evolve into a god. Many of his problems are an inevitable result of this struggle."

Now it is possible that you may not wish to take your fiction laced with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, though De Sade may be almost too familiar a figure. But bear with Colin Wilson, for his vampires set a rattling pace in their attack on humanity. Very soon the President of the United States is involved in their entanglement, with the beginnings of yet another world war, a visit to the moon and routine space-flying.

The whole affair begins in 1994 and is comfortably set in the future with uncomfortable flashbacks to the present. The time sequences are cunning and convincing. You don't have to be a science-fiction addict to go along with Colin Wilson, though he is fairly adept in the use of SF techniques. In spite of the fact that this is a story within a story and, therefore, one cannot look

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forward to a climax of surprise, there is enough impetus to carry the story along, noting with a sort of grim satisfaction the rapid decline and collapse of civilisation. For me it was the same sort of morbid interest as that aroused by some work of the late Nevil Shute; less realistic, but more intellectually compelling.

☐ **A ROUGH LOT.** Fictionally, this month has not been rich in pleasant characters and it remains for Jeremy Potter with *Foul Play* (Constable, 21s.) to take the cake with a deliberately foul team, a hockey team at that, and quite the most repulsive of the lot. Like the other novelists here reviewed, he is to be commended on the originality of his setting. To stage some foul murders among members of a top hockey club appropriately called the Old Soaks, is a daring enterprise. He succeeds because he makes the situation credible and keeps the reader guessing to the end—which are the essentials of crime fiction. But what ghastly types he creates to carry the burden of his tale.

Let us take a glimse of them Before and After, so to speak. When suspicions are first aroused, our hero glances round him and sees this: "The Old Soaks were certainly a rough lot, but weren't they decent enough beneath the surface? Could multi-company chairman Fitch be a murderer? Or the easy-going Boozy or Basil? Or George the headmaster? Or Frank the respectable accountant? Or Charles the womanising Marine? Julian the international centre-forward and Fitch heir had everything at his feet. The other young forwards, Paul and Henry and Bob Macgregor, could surely not be involved. Nor Patrick Blair of the F.O. or Thompson of the City."

The wickedness being duly resolved, Jeremy Potter indulges in the agreeable cynicism of leaving the Old Soaks "still unrepentantly in play". He lets us see the meeting in which they perpetuate themselves.

"Patrick rose to his feet to move a vote of thanks to the Chair, Henry seconded with a belch, Square-Mile moved over to regale Freda with his latest smutty story, Bob was wrapped admiringly round Hermione, and Charles and Paul began arguing over which strip-clubs might be open on a Sunday afternoon. Inspector Hiscock viewed the scene in mournful amazement, while Father Fitch playfully blew his umpire's whistle to restore order."

One does not take up one's crime ration to seek pleasant characters, though there is always comfort in Maigret, but I hope Jeremy Potter may be persuaded to make up for this in his next with a few traces of human kindness.

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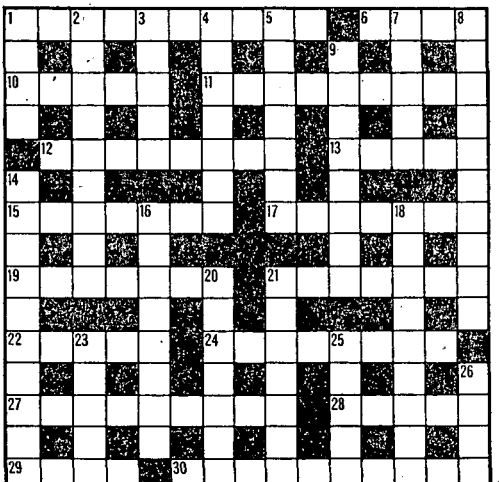
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 A sea-trip when there is needn't be regretted! (4, 2, 4).

6 Side-lines for gifted poets? (4).

10 Funny nobleman returns with a pound (5).

11 Paste soon converted into French chalk (4–5).

12 Steamer containing cured fish for master-mariners (8).

13 A shot may be heard in court? (5).

15 Naturally, it's a wearing process (7).

17 Eminent feature of a picnic? (7).

19 The state of the largest church (7).

21 He can make ladders, and he works in leather (7).

22 Gets rid of melancholy (5).

24 They're a help when we don't know where to turn! (4, 4).

27 About rendering a return (9).

28 May expect a tip, even though he's a director! (5).

29 Dies maimed in the flank (4).

30 Total numbers (10).

DOWN

1 Poor horse? But it's a jewel! (4).

2 Cattle left on Merseyside? (9).

3 There's no hope when it's . . . (3, 2).

4 . . . an exciting film we back! (7).

5 Encourages advances when terminals are connected? (5, 2).

7 Jack dismissed? Not exactly! (5).

8 Weeps for the huts' rents (5, 5).

9 Change to a dress of various materials? (8).

14 Positions in stately homes offering good prospects (10).

16 Cutting teeth? (8).

18 Today's most popular writer! (4–5).

20 "Still —— the unconquerable hope" (Arnold) (7).

21 One who scrutinises a radar aerial (7).

23 Went on board and proposed? (5).

25 Giant activity seen in a small magazine! (5).

26 Catcalls we take up in writing (4).

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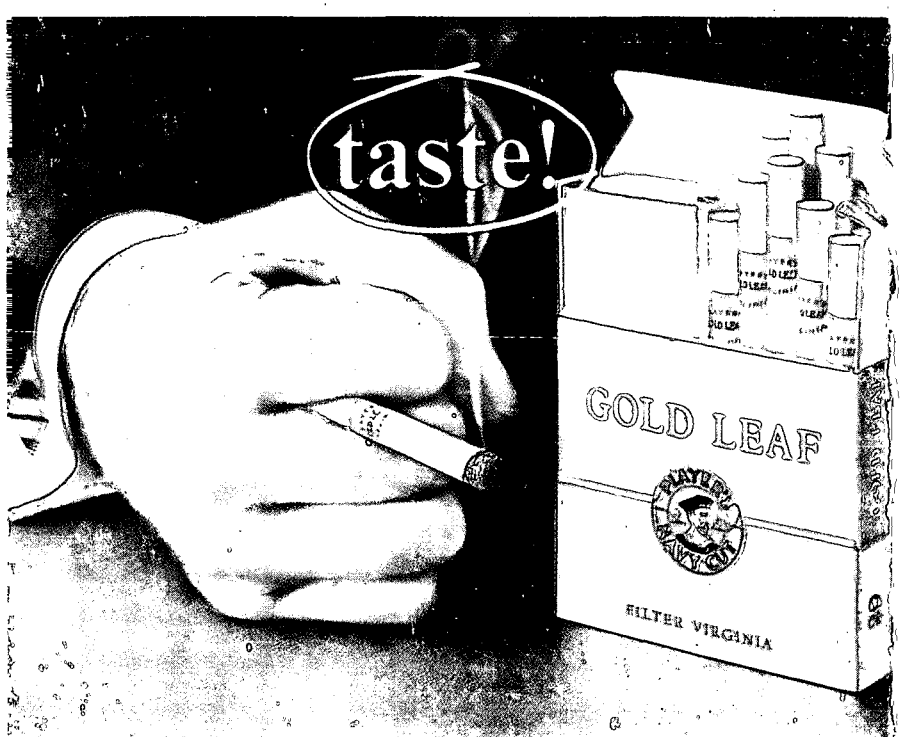

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